

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



SEPT 1984

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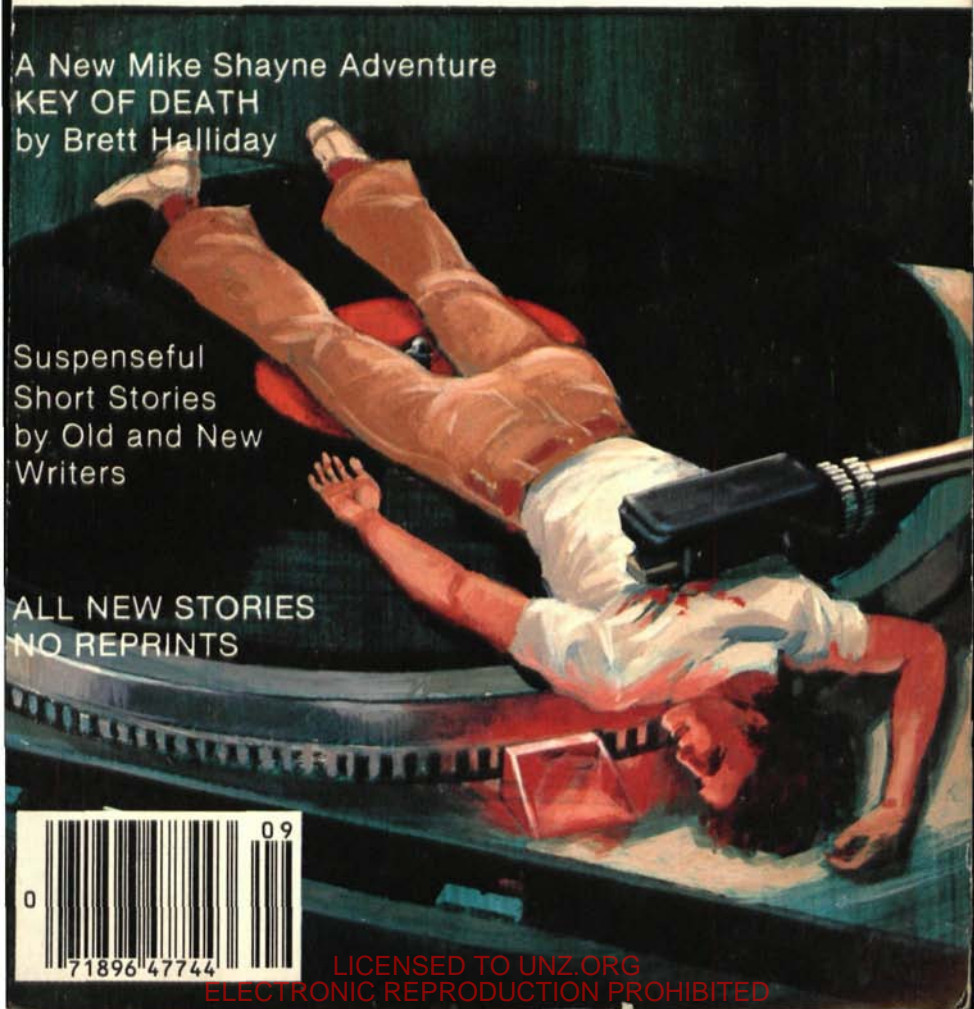


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A New Mike Shayne Adventure
KEY OF DEATH
by Brett Halliday

Suspenseful
Short Stories
by Old and New
Writers

ALL NEW STORIES
NO REPRINTS



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This is the man — Lon Chaney...

and these

are his thousand faces!

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the woman
he loved...

...and this is
the woman
he hated!

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as the fabulous **Lon Chaney**
DOROTHY MALONE

JANE GREER

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lay hidden from the world
behind the magic of
his make-up!

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Screenplay by R. WRIGHT CAMPBELL, IVAN GOFF and BEN ROBERTS
Story by RALPH WHEELWRIGHT
Directed by JOSEPH Pevney • Produced by ROBERT ARTHUR



**"MAN OF A
THOUSAND
FACES"**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

KEY OF DEATH

by Brett Halliday

Between spinning platters, disc jockey Doctor Death gave Miami grim reminders that murder and mayhem stalked its streets. Mike Shayne didn't need reminding. Death was his constant companion, and murder was his business!..... 4

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Doctor Death of KILL-FM was only a dj, but sometimes, Shayne thought, his shots were right on target—like his name for Miami: Murder City, USA. There wasn't much the redheaded shamus had done recently to disprove it, and from the way things were going, the situation wasn't about to improve!

Key of Death

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MIKE SHAYNE LEANED AGAINST THE WINDOW FRAME that faced Flagler Street. For over an hour the big investigator had been spread eagled in his office, resting his forehead on the giant pane, never once moving, watching daylight steal into dusk. His steel-grey eyes took in every action. The Hispanic whore trying for the hat trick, Barney the Bud peddling flowers to every car that halted for the stop-light, to a figure in a baseball cap who looked vaguely familiar.

Damn it, he thought. What's wrong with me? Why can't I make myself move? I haven't been drugged, shot, or anything. What am I waiting for? Someone to get run over? A mugging?

Unable to answer the questions, he simply continued to stare through his own tired reflection.

SHAW LAY SILENTLY BEHIND THE FALLEN PALM, WATCHING the giant beetle crawl over his camouflage-clad leg. He didn't dare move. Any telltale sign and he could be spotted. Besides, in another few minutes it would be dark, and they could move on. He doubted the other side had infra-red glasses, but that like everything else in this hot,

tropical atmosphere offered little comfort.

Like a tiny drunk, the beetle was staggering up his leg toward his crotch. For the hundreth time Shaw asked himself what he was doing here. Kroger and Lorca he could understand. Hell, they had served in Nam and enjoyed this stuff. "Just for the weekend," they had said. "You'll love it." Right now he would have paid for the entire happy hour if they could have been back at The Beef House where this whole thing had started.

Something was moving through the brush, making an occasional branch or frond jiggle in a way the humid April breeze didn't. He didn't even know if he should hope it was a man. The palm beetle must have thought he was dead, for it was inching up his chest towards his face. What in hell did those things eat anyway?

Shaw listened carefully. Not a single bird. That bothered him. Throughout the late afternoon they had chanted away, but since dusk, not one.

He heard a sucking sound as though something were slouching ponderously toward him.

Shaw glanced up. The beetle, almost in his face, seemed a giant turtle.

"Shit!" he yelled, and swatted it off him with the barrel of his pistol. Then without thinking he was standing up, stomping on it, grinding the vile insect deep into the swamp that had spawned it.

A figure appeared behind him with a pistol.

"Kroger," he said loudly with more hope than courage.

"You stupid ass," said the big man, grabbing him around the throat. "We're damned close to the enemy. You trying to give our position away? Who you working for anyway?"

They heard a funny sound like a distant jet passing.

"My God," shouted Shaw, "I've been hit."

LUCY HAMILTON STOOD IN THE DOORWAY TO THE PRIVATE investigator's office. "Mike," said the secretary, "it's been three hours and you haven't moved, you haven't said a thing. Are you sure there's nothing wrong?"

"What? Oh, it's you, Angel," he answered without looking toward her. "Just go on home. I'll be all right."

"You sure?" She pushed her light-brown hair out of her eyes. "I mean," she said nervously, "I don't know why I should worry. At least you're in the office. It's not like some guy with a grudge is after you or anything. Heaven knows, you've been in worse . . ."

The shrill ring startled her. She picked up the redhead's phone.

"Michael Shayne, Investigations. Yes. Yes. No, I don't think tonight's a good time. Perhaps Monday. You see, Mr. Shayne rarely even works on Sundays. Oh. Oh. Just a minute."

"Michael?"

"Yeah."

"It's a Mr., eh Dr. Jason Fields. He says he has to see you now. He claims this is the only time he can make it and that Monday evening would be too late. Should I tell him that . . ."

"I'll see him as soon as he can get here," said Shayne.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, Angel. I think I've been standing here all afternoon waiting for him to call."

KROGER HADN'T MOVED. THEY HAD BEEN PRONE BEHIND the old palm for almost half an hour when he decided the attacker had moved on. He pulled the two-way out of his pocket and raised the telescoping antenna.

"Black Fox to Camera One, Black Fox to Camera One. Come in, Camera One."

The radio squawked alive. "Camera One to Black Fox, I copy. Where are you?"

"Near the intersection of coordinates Delta 2-1 and Tango 3-5. I got some bad news. Shaw's out of it."

Kroger glanced over at his black companion, his green shirt stained with a splotch of orange paint. "We should have listened to you, kid. You were right. Nothing but a damned amateur."

LUCY HAMILTON SET THE PIZZA ON SHAYNE'S DESK AND popped open the cold Tuborg the delivery boy had brought. "One Royal Feast with extra cheese, your favorite," she said. "Come on! You haven't left the office, and you haven't eaten a thing, so why don't you try some."

The big detective was still framed by the window. Red neon flashing outside pierced his white shirt, giving the illusion he was bleeding.

His secretary shuddered involuntarily. The sight was almost a confirmation of her worst fears. She sat down, shaking, glad he hadn't turned toward her and confirmed what she knew waited just around a corner for him. Her hand reached out and flipped on the desktop radio. Anything to take her mind away.

A maniacal cackle emerged from the digitally-lit, black plastic, followed by a voice that seemed to rise out of a huge cavern. "Good evening, Miami. Now is the nocturnal hour, that time when our closest

friends become our nearest enemies, that time when you, like the poet, admit, 'I have been half in love with easeful death.' Confess, my children. Do ye not feel better having turned control of your lives over to me, the voice from our common crypt? Yes, it is I, Doctor Death."

Lucy reached for the switch.

"Leave it, Angel," said Shayne without looking. "He's got a point. Miami is Murder City, USA, isn't it?"

"Now to all you homicidal homo sapiens," continued the radio, "the good doctor would like to dedicate this little ditty from yesterday. Straight from the Sick Sixties march the Beatles chanting our national anthem, 'Happiness Is A Warm Gun.' "

LORCA CAME SLITHERING OUT OF THE WATER. EMERGING like an alligator, he spotted the man in fatigues still hunched behind a giant yucca. The figure was taking aim on something. As instinctively as if he were smacking a mosquito, Lorca swung his pistol up. It coughed twice in rapid succession.

Two hits, right in the chest.

"HOW DID ALL YOU STALKERS IN THE SLAYGROUNDS LIKE my resurrecting that one?" boomed the deep voice. "Dr. Death will return from the unknown beyond in just a minute to that temporary state men call life after these messages. You're listening to KILL-FM, the bullseye on your dial."

"Turn that garbage off, Shaw," said Kroger as he buried the empty rations can in the sand. "That guy's a real looney-tunes."

"And we're not? Look at you. You're talking to a dead man or haven't you noticed?" he said, pointing to the orange spot on his own chest.

Kroger shook his head.

"You didn't tell me those CO2-propelled pellets sting. This stuff come off?" asked Shaw, noticing it had soaked through his clothes onto his skin.

The black man swiped the still-squawking radio from his hand.

"Easy, Kroger. The other side knows I'm dead. The last place they're going to look for you is with a dead man. You couldn't be safer."

"Yeah, you're probably right. That stuff on you's just orange paint. A little turpentine and you're as good as new."

"The clothes?"

"Throw 'em out."

Shaw pulled out a cigarette and lit up. "You know, I still can't

believe you and Lorca do this every weekend."

"It beats sorting letters. It's about as far away from looking at Miami zipcodes as you can get by just going a few miles."

"I know what you mean: Walking the same route, getting bit by the same dogs, having old ladies assault you because you won't sell them a stamp gets to me. But I'd rather hang out at the Beef House and drink all weekend than this."

"This weekend's different. Usually me and Lorca come out to the 'Glades for about three hours on a Saturday morning to play."

"I thought I gave up Capture the Flag when I was a kid."

Kroger continued, "But this assault's big. First time the organizers have tried anything at night on such a grand scale. But for \$200 we thought it was worth it."

"That what you bet?"

"Yeah, Hibbard, the honcho behind this here Survival Game, was in Nam with us. We figured after surviving Rolling Thunder, this'd be a piece of cake. The rest I can't explain to you."

"You mean," said Shaw, "because I wasn't in Southeast Asia."

"Yup. Till you sat through a monsoon with VC burrowing around you like termites in an old house you can't understand what gets into a man during war. Something just crawls into your system. It's a virus that won't ever let you alone, and like a virus you got to feed it till it's run its course. Hey, while we're waiting for the spic, did I ever tell you about the time we were sent down to Chi Loc Vihn for a month. There was a small TAC-site there with some Hawks that needed guarding in case Charlie came calling."

They both heard the splashing. Kroger grabbed Shaw's Nel-Spot gun and pointed both it and his toward the bayou. The moon broke from behind some scudding clouds illuminating the shadows between the sitting figures and the water.

A man was coming toward them.

Just before Kroger squeezed the triggers he recognized it was Lorca staggering through the sand.

Shaw stood up and caught him. "Oh, Christ," he said, pointing to the wet splotch on their friend's chest.

It was bright red.

LUCY HAMILTON PACED NERVOUSLY FROM THE OUTER office back into Shayne's private sanctum. "Thank God you let me turn off the radio," she said. "You sure you're not hungry?"

The pizza stared up at her from the desk like a cold, distant moon.

"Go let our client in," said the big detective. He was standing in the

same position.

The brunette secretary hadn't heard a thing, but taking the redhead's word she headed into the outer office.

A thin man with a brushy mustache and the whitest skin she had ever seen came through the door. He was carrying a brown Samsonite briefcase in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Are you Dr. Fields?" she asked.

"I am. Is he still here?"

"Yes," she said. As she led him into the inner office, she tried to lighten the mood and explain the situation. "That is Mr. Shayne by the window, and don't worry, he's not going to jump."

"I should hope not," said the visitor, collapsing into the chair in front of the redhead's desk. "I need his help. Somebody has threatened to kill me."

II

LUCY HAMILTON STARED DOWN AT THE MUSTACHED figure. He was hyperventilating. "Can I get you anything?" she said.

"A glass of water," he answered, pulling out a yellow vial and producing two pills. "So I can take these. Thorazine. My therapist prescribed it for me."

"You're seeing a psychologist?" said Shayne, still not moving.

"Psychotherapist actually. Yes, for the last two years. You see I'm a phobic."

"A phobic?" said the redhead.

"I suffer from agoraphobia."

"Fear of horizons and open places."

Lucy handed him a glass of water, and he immediately downed the two pills. "I suffer from fear of the daylight. That's why I've been trying to see you at night. I never venture outside during the day."

"Doesn't that make it difficult to practice medicine?" inquired Shayne.

"Oh, I'm not that kind of doctor. I'm a senior professor of psychology over at Florida American. Even though I just came, my chairman has been very understanding and has arranged it so that I only teach night courses."

"How long have you been a phobic?" said the redhead.

"About eighteen years."

The brunette secretary's surprise was quite audible. Then, after regaining her composure, she said, "You mean for eighteen years you haven't been outside?"

"Not when the sun's out. In August of 1966 I attended a Saturday

afternoon Simon & Garfunkel concert. Little did I know that their song 'Sound of Silence' would have a deep meaning in years to come."

"What do you mean?" asked Lucy, obviously fascinated by the story.

"Remember the first line—'Hello, darkness, my old friend'? Well, the night has been my only companion since that afternoon when I ran screaming from the concert."

Shayne stared at the pale figure's reflection in the plate glass beside his own. "You said you were threatened. How?"

"A voice on the telephone."

"Tell me exactly what the voice said."

"That's easy. I'll not forget those words. 'Moonlight can be just as deadly to you as daylight.'"

"Obviously your caller knows about your phobia. What did he mean by 'moonlight'? Wait a minute. Do you have some job other than the one at the University?"

"That's the irony, I suppose. I moonlight during the day. I live alone, but even just getting by is difficult on what a private school like FAU pays me. So, like a lot of my colleagues, I pick up extra here and there."

"Doing what?" inquired Lucy Hamilton.

"You know, the usual. Magazine articles, a little consultation work, a grant now and then."

Shayne said, "How does your administration feel about your after-hours work?"

"They move in strange ways, but like I said before, they've been real supportive about my problems. Besides, the extent of most administrative threats is telling you to your face if you don't publish a book soon, your contact is not going to be picked up."

"If you don't mind my asking," said Shayne's secretary, "how could a man in your position of all things be unable to . . ."

"Physician, heal thyself, you mean," said Fields.

"Lucy," said the redhead, "I've known a lot of good baseball coaches who couldn't hit a major-league curveball."

"You understand then," said the professor.

SHAYNE WONDERED IF HE DID. AFTER ALL, HE HAD BEEN standing in front of the same window for three hours unable to get himself moving. In each of his last couple of cases, he had been witness to somebody being brutally killed. He was beginning to feel like death's bloodhound. Wherever he went, the long sleep was just a step behind. Perhaps his unconscious, figuring if he didn't move death couldn't

follow, had given him a mandate to remain motionless.

Concentrating intently, the big redhead forced himself to take a single step away from the window. You couldn't live letting other things direct your life. Another step. Tearing loose the psychic adhesions took as much effort as escaping the knotted ropes that had bound him within a deserted warehouse during his last case.

Two more steps. It came down to that—you did what you had to. He sat down at his desk, pushing aside the petrified pizza. "Was anything about the voice on the phone familiar?"

"No. Just a man."

Shayne continued, "You said you get special treatment. Does anybody resent it?"

"Not that I know of. In fact, I take the classes nobody else wants."

The redhead knew he had little to go on, but that in itself intrigued him. It had been a long time since a case had looked like it needed more brain-power than muscle. "Suppose I do a little checking around and drop by the University on Monday evening?"

"My first class is at 7:00. Carroway Hall. Room 211."

"Fine." Shayne stood up and shook the professor's hand. "Lucy will have you sign a standard contract on the way out."

Fields wiped his face with a white handkerchief, the two things almost blending together. "I don't want to appear ungrateful, but am I hearing you say that you want me to just go on about my life as though nobody threatened me?"

"When did you get the call?"

"Last night after class. About nine o'clock."

"I thought it was fairly recent. If your caller were going to do something immediately, he wouldn't have called to warn you. Besides, 95% of all threats are meaningless."

Reluctantly Dr. Jason Fields picked up his briefcase. He pulled out a pocket tape recorder and pushed a button. Classical music filled the office. "My psychotherapist recommended something soothing. It's Rossini, 'The William Tell Overture,'" he added as he departed.

All Shayne could think of was the Lone Ranger.

When Lucy Hamilton returned to her boss's office, she found the big redhead once again in front of the window.

"Michael."

"Don't worry, Angel. I've unstuck myself. When I was standing here earlier, I spotted a vaguely familiar figure in a ballcap outside. I just realized it was our old friend, Chester Reid."

"Oh, my God. Not him."

"It gets worse, Angel. When the professor walked outside, Reid

started following him.”

THE THREE CARS DROVE WEST ON THE TAMiami TRAIL like a funeral procession. Jason Fields’ Toyota in the lead, followed by Chester Reid’s used Cadillac, then Shayne’s green Buick. The redhead had hurried from his office, jumped into his car, and caught up with the other two about the time Reid’s car had swung away from the Flagler Street curb.

Questions tumbled through the big detective’s mind. Why was Chester Reid tailing his client? Since Reid had been stationed outside the redhead’s office well before the professor arrived, how had he known Fields would show up? Or, for some reason, was Reid just waiting there to tail anybody who visited MICHAEL SHAYNE, INVESTIGATIONS?

Most importantly, why was a sleaze-bag like Reid interested in a college professor anyway?

Reid had crossed Shayne’s path quite a few times in the past, and like a black cat he brought nothing but trouble. At 5’8” and 195 pounds, with a belly that was the final resting place for half the Coors in the Magic City, and a bald head that shone like a distant beacon, Reid always looked to the redhead like he was anything but what he was, a private investigator. Or in his case, thought Shayne, a dick. The fat man’s speciality was divorce. If a person wanted it bad enough and was willing to pay the price, it was said that Reid could obtain obscene pictures of the President and the First Lady. Shayne had no doubt that some of the clients he had turned down because of the nature of their requests—“glossy 10X12’s of my wife in a compromising position”—headed directly for Reid’s Miami Beach office. And how could they miss finding him. Reid had taken half a yellow page to advertise his speciality that came complete with an accompanying drawing that depicted a phallic-like long-range camera lens poking through a keyhole. Ah, freedom of expression, decided the redhead.

The Toyota turned off the Tamiami Trail and headed in the general direction of Florida American University. The redhead knew he professed a live-and-let-live attitude, but he also knew that wasn’t always the truth. He remembered the last time he had seen Reid. Shayne had been coming out of the Dade County Courthouse where he had testified in a rape case when he bumped into the fat man. Reid had held up five \$1000 bills.

“It comes from having friends,” he had bragged.

Shayne, still bitter at how a defense attorney had verbally raped his client-victim in the case, had tried to just walk on by.

"Five big ones," Reid had bragged anyway, "because I testified Julio's ex-wife had propositioned over a dozen men during her week-end shopping trip to Bimini. I wonder what color Cadillac I should buy this year."

THE BEAT-UP LUXURY CAR PULLED OFF TO THE SIDE OF the road. So did Shayne. Just ahead, Fields' Toyota had paused before a townhouse complex. As the garage door went up, the car went in. Reid waited a few minutes until a first-floor light came on, then pulled away.

Shayne made a quick decision. There was no reason to stay here, so he began to tail Reid. Something bothered the detective though. Professor Jason Fields had openly admitted his need to moonlight because of his low pay. How then was the college teacher able to afford a townhouse in West Miami that Shayne placed around the two-hundred-thousand-dollar neighborhood?

The big investigator hung well back in the night-time traffic as Reid swung back on the Tamiami Trail heading east. His car rolled smoothly, and since he rarely glanced in his mirrors, Shayne felt reasonably sure he was going undetected. They drove almost into Biscayne Bay before Reid turned south.

Shayne immediately recognized the place the sleazy detective stopped. Purgatorio was a 16th-century-style Italian palace built around the turn of the century. It had recently been sold to some South American millionaire, who had changed it from a residency to an exclusive club. The redhead recalled reading a proposed four-part investigative series about it in the *Miami Daily News* that had ended after the second part when the writer was found in his car at the bottom of the Intracoastal Waterway. Metro police had surmised the reporter had missed a turn, and the series was never finished.

What, Shayne asked himself, was a lowlife like Reid doing there? The fat man hadn't investigated enough divorce cases in his entire career to be able to afford a membership.

Reid showed a card to a guard at the gate and was admitted. Shayne drove past the mansion and turned down a side street that bordered the grounds. Over the top of the high stucco wall he could hear faint mariachi music. The redhead torched a Camel. There was absolutely no logical reason he could think of why he shouldn't just drive off and start working on the Fields' case in the morning.

He pulled a blue sports coat, a club tie, and his oxblood wallet from the Buick's trunk, then climbed up and over the wall. Nobody seemed to be patrolling the insides, and he saw no evidence of dogs or elec-

tronic safeguards. Sometimes the very rich, he decided, thought that their money alone was intimidating enough to protect them.

He passed through a grove of trees that smelled like lemon. Up ahead he heard laughing and splashing. Pushing aside a hibiscus, the redhead spotted a pool party in full swim. Two faces belonging to two male guests jumped out at him. The detective tried to jog his memory. The man was Hispanic . . . El Salvador . . . exile . . . something to do with a rebel faction. The other man was also Hispanic. His arm was draped around an anemic blonde who was seeing nothing but better days ahead. The second man had something to do with Bogota.

Look like you know what you're doing, Shayne told himself as he emerged from behind the bushes. *Appear like you belong*. It had worked in the past.

Not now.

The detective immediately recognized the circular imprint in his back as belonging to the muzzle of a .45.

IV

THE SIZE OF THE ITALIAN PALACE'S INTERIOR WAS DIFFICULT for Shayne to figure. A huge golden haze that the redhead was certain from its smell was the best that Columbia and Turkey could produce hung heavily. He forced himself to take short, quick breaths, trying to inhale the drug fumes as little as possible.

Three men marched him from room to room obviously attempting to find a man referred to only as Mr. De Leon. Each room was a variation on the same theme. Some form of illegal activity was going on from baccarat to a huge television screen that was showing bullfights from Mexico City. The villa's inhabitants came in two sizes. The men were dark with their long hair slicked back. The women were blonde, and there seemed twice as many of them.

Both species had one thing in common. Their eyes, as hazy as the room, absent of real life, seemed distant, unable to believe what was happening was real.

All the rooms were ornate. Floor-to-ceiling gilded mirrors, fancy scrolled columns of marble, inlaid floors. Somebody had as much money as they did a lack of taste. Shayne knew little about interior decorating, but he saw enough to realize that every room was overdone, excessive. Decadent, Lucy would have said.

A gun and a sneer shoved him into a huge room that was bigger than the Miami Beach Auditorium. Ghostlike couples floated across the floor as a band in the corner, a bit heavy on the brass, played tunes that the redhead knew had been born long before him. A golden balcony

surrounded the circular room like a halo, but these people were scarcely angels. At either end of the ballroom staircases spiraled to the balcony. To its rear were numerous doors through which the detective watched blonde and Hispanic couples disappear. Around her neck, he noticed, every blonde had a key.

Somebody had built a real pleasure palace, a whorehouse on the scale of the Orange Bowl.

They left the musical land of tailored suits and blonde-wigged mannequins, passed through a room of dice tables, and arrived at a set of double doors. A man in a white suit stood on either side. The redhead's senses already reeling from the journey, he heard a noise from inside that sounded like bazooka shells exploding.

Shayne went sprawling in. It was a regulation Jai Alai court, much like the one in West Palm that Lucy liked him to take her to. Straight ahead behind a wall of transparent plastic loomed a large court a little bigger than the one used to play basketball. Two men, one in a red shirt and the other in yellow, were in the middle of a game.

The redhead went through a door, up some stairs, and emerged in a box directly behind the players. A hand pointed to a chair in the second row, and the redhead sat. Two men in the first row were screaming and shouting. Money changed hands faster than at a bank teller's window as they bet on everything from the number of walls the ball would hit to where the serve would land.

One of the men who had escorted him in whispered something to a baldheaded man in a deep-black shirt and white tie who was wearing sunglasses in the dimly-lit room.

The game continued. "Who are you?" said the bald man without bothering to look back at him.

A gun prodded Shayne's back.

"Call me curious," said the redhead. "I can't resist good music."

"His wallet, Miguel."

A hand pulled a wallet out of the redhead's rear pocket and handed it ahead to the bald man. Still watching the game and betting, he began to scan the contents. "It says you are from Louisville, Kentucky."

"That's right," said Shayne. "I'm a salesman for Hillerich & Bradley. You need any baseball equipment?"

"Baseball?"

"Yeah," said the detective, "you know 'Star-spangled Banner', peanuts, can't tell the players without a scorecard, double play, wild pitch." Shayne was thankful that he had switched wallets back at the Buick. "Say, I could get you a real good deal on a Louisville Slugger. I bet you'd take about a 39."

"This Louisville Slugger I do not know, but somehow it is I do not trust you. Do you understand Jai Alai, Mr. Card?"

"Looks like handball played with half a lacrosse stick."

The bald man bet \$1000 that the player in red would win the serve. "Never," he said, "bet against a player named Jesus on a Sunday. That basket around their hands is called a cesta. The ball is a pelota. The players are Basque, trained in their native Spain to do nothing but play ball."

"Sort of like the inner city here," said Shayne in the best hick accent he could muster.

"What? Oh, a joke." The bald man stood up and waved a cigar that looked as long as a baton. "My name is Victor De Leon. You are in my house, and in my house I tell the jokes. Now I tell you something funny. You are going to tell me everything I want to know, and you are going to start by telling me what you are doing on my land."

"You think he works for Wrightman?" said the man sitting beside him who was winning most of the bets.

"*Callate la boca, Luis,*" snapped the bald man, taking off the shades.

Noting that De Leon's dark eyes showed more life than anything else he had seen around the place tonight, the redhead asked, "What's this boca you're talking about? That what they play for? A thousand bocas."

"The boca," came the answer, "is the mouth, and yours had better start to move."

"Shoot, I done told you everything. My name is Henry Lee Card. I sell baseball gloves and bats. I heard this hot Latin music . . ."

"Take him down to the cancha," ordered De Leon.

Shayne was dragged down the stairs. A door opened and he found himself on a well-lighted concrete floor.

A voice boomed over an unseen speaker. "That pelota they are using can travel at speeds around two-hundred-and-forty kilometers per hour. Show him, Jesus."

Cradling the ball in his basket, Jesus ran toward the redhead, stopped, and windmilled his arm. The hard ball shot past the detective's ear and struck the rear wall like a .357 slug.

"One-hundred-and-fifty miles per hour," barked the loudspeaker. "Cadiz, show me how accurate you are. Hit the man's sports jacket, but not him."

The arm whipped once, and before Shayne could blink, the pelota clipped his pocket. "You convinced me, boy," said the redhead as he figured his best move. He was tired of playing target to a bunch of

fronton rejects. "That Cadiz has a real live arm. You want old Henry Lee to get him a tryout with some scouts I know, right?"

De Leon stood up in his booth and pressed against the glass. In his distorted face the redhead could still see a man who was used to getting what he wanted. "Jesus," De Leon shouted into a microphone. "Your next shot. I am betting Luis \$10,000 dollars—half as much of which I will pay you—that you can place the next shot directly between Mr. Card's gray eyes."

V

SHAYNE KNEW HOW DUCKS IN A SHOOTING GALLERY felt. His forehead itched as though it had a bullseye painted on it, but he wasn't going to go out a sitting duck.

A faint plan formed quickly. The yellow shirt began his approach. Shayne waited until the exact moment of release, then dropped to his knees. Grabbing his coat collar, he thrust his arms straight upward, all the while hoping Cadiz was as good as advertised.

The black ball rocketed into the blue cloth tearing the fabric and jerking the redhead backward.

The big detective did a backroll and came up standing. He didn't worry about the two diminutive basket cases before him. They were useless without the pelota.

Shayne bolted for the door. A white suit came through, a .45 in his hand.

The redhead whipped the coat forward. As it covered the pistol, the detective temporarily ended the man's love life with a kick to the groin.

Stepping past the fallen, writhing figure, Shayne went through the door. The familiar click of drawn hammers greeted him. He stopped cold. Two white suits stood on the stairs above him.

Was this how it all ended, with his guts splattered all over the first floor of a high-class whorehouse?

"Hold it!" demanded a voice from above them.

The redhead spotted Chester Reid. Beside him was a blonde whose face looked as washed out as her hair. "He works for me, Mr. De Leon. I told him to meet me here. I thought it would be O.K."

De Leon barked something in Spanish. The revolvers disappeared.

Shayne was shocked. Why had Reid lied? What could the fat man gain by saving the detective's skin?

Reid waddled down the stairs, put an arm around Shayne, and said through tequila breath, "Sorry I almost got you killed, buddy, but you should have waited at the front gate."

"You're telling me, Chet," said Shayne, refusing to look a gift horse

in its yellow-toothed boca.

"Now come on, let's leave Mr. De Leon to his pleasures." Reid turned to the blonde. "Thanks for the tour, Nadine, honey. We'll do it again sometime soon."

The blonde yawned and dropped her head to De Leon's shoulder.

AFTER THE COBALT-BLUE CADDY HAD PASSED THROUGH the front gate, Shayne directed Reid to the Buick. "Why did you do it, Reid?" said the redhead, torching a Camel.

Reid reached over and took a butt. "Hey, we P.I.'s got to stick together. You and me work the same side of the street."

"Yeah," said Shayne, "but your end of the block and mine are pretty far apart."

The fat man lit up. "That's funny. We both ended up at the same bus stop."

"Why did you tail Fields?"

"Why did Fields hire you?" said Reid as he pulled in behind the Buick.

"You know that's privileged information."

"So's mine." Reid blew out a smoke ring. "Hey, I got an idea. Why don't we team up, pool our info?"

"I work alone."

"I can see it now—REID AND SHAYNE, INVESTIGATIONS."

"Listen . . ."

"O.K., SHAYNE AND REID, INVESTIGATIONS, partner."

Shayne shook his head. "Let's just say I don't want to spend the extra \$250 for a Class A license." The redhead opened the Caddy's door. "Answer me one thing."

"Shoot."

"How did you know Fields would come to me?"

"Just to show you I'm serious about working together, I'll tell you. De Leon gave me the scoop. You think over my offer, hear? With your rep and my contacts we'd make a dynamite team, partner."

That was the problem, Shayne thought. Reid was serious.

LATE MONDAY AFTERNOON FOUND THE RAWBONED detective pulling into the Beef House parking lot for a quick dinner before going to meet Fields at FAU. He had spent the morning biting the bullet, doing the paperwork he had been unable to finish that weekend. If there were a hell, he knew it was going to involve filling out one form after another. The afternoon had been a comparative holiday. He had run down a fly-by-night contractor who had stiffed an ad agency

client with a five-figure cold check.

By the time the redhead reached the bar, Pat had already drawn him a cold draft. "Take a load off," said the smiling bartender.

"Thanks, Pat." Shayne lifted the frosty mug. "Give me a Number One, rare, and go heavy on the onions."

"Well, obviously you're not meeting Lucy tonight."

Shayne smiled. Wheeling around to head for his booth, he spotted two of the Beef House regulars sitting in the corner. Their table was almost completely covered with empty beer pitchers, and they were working on a bottle of rye the size of a fire plug. "Hey, Pat, we got a wake or something over there?"

"Don't joke, Mike. Those guys are in a pretty low mood. Something happened to one of their buddies, but they aren't too talkative."

Shayne edged toward their table. "Anything I can do, Deke?" the redhead said softly to the black man.

"Never should have gone to that damn swamp," said the black under his breath. "Should have stayed right here and got stewed like we usually do. Don't know why I let you guys talk me into your silly war games."

"What's eating you?" said Shayne.

Deke Shaw poured himself another shot and downed it quickly. "Life's funny, ain't it, Mike? Pete spent two tours in Nam and got nothing more than a hangover. He comes back and buys the ranch not more than twenty miles from Miami."

Mel Kroger raised his filled glass. "Here's to the Great Southwest Florida Survival Game," he slurred.

Shaw splashed some rye into an empty glass and handed it to Shayne. "We bought this bottle in honor of Pete Lorca so that anybody comes in can get a glass in his memory."

Shayne hoped the memory lasted longer than the bottle.

"Drink with a friend," continued the black. "To the memory of Pete a/k/a Pedro, one hell of a fighter."

Shayne threw down the whiskey. "What happened? I thought the most dangerous thing you mailmen ever did was go into a fenced yard marked BEWARE OF DOG."

"It was," said Kroger, "until we got wrapped up with survival games on the weekends."

"Survival games?" said Shayne.

"Yeah," said Shaw. "A good way to blow off steam they told me. Crawl through a little mud, shoot a few guys with wet paint, then drink till you can't see straight. That last part appealed to me."

"Only this weekend," said Kroger, "somebody forgot to put paint in

a gun."

"What happened?" asked the redhead.

Shaw said, "Somebody shot Pete with a .38."

"Police questioned us into the night," added Kroger, "but we didn't see anybody. Pete came staggering out of the water and died at our feet."

"A hunting accident?" said Shayne. Then he answered his own question. "No, you only hunt one thing with a .38."

"Yeah," said Kroger.

"What do the police think?" said Shayne.

"Not much, and they don't have much hope of finding out who did it or why," said Shaw. "The 'Glades aren't exactly downtown Miami."

When the steak arrived, Shayne stuck to his liquid meal.

"THE WHITE CLOUDS ARE ROLLING IN FROM THE SOUTH. Just below the point of the crescent, if you look closely, you can see the Black Ghost. Yes, my people, Dr. Death once more walks among you, searching for that special someone on whom to bestow the ultimate gift . . . Non-life. The veil of eternal sleep is but moments away. And now this. You are listening to Miami's top-rated, night-time program on KILL-FM, the station that . . ."

Shayne switched off the radio as he swung onto the FAU campus. He never thought he would yearn for normal deejays like Wolfman Jack and Murray the K. Some things you didn't joke about. Some things, as a famous writer had once said, you didn't even think about. Fears were like sleeping dogs.

And this campus was a pound. The redhead remembered a woman, an ex-prostitute named Susan whom he had been trying to help better herself by getting an education. He had fallen . . .

Shayne pushed the memories aside as he strode into Carroway Hall. A sloe-eyed coed said something quite unladylike as he passed. Dr. Jason Fields' lab was on the second floor.

The pale professor was hunched over a computer terminal when the redhead walked into 211. "Ah, Mr. Shayne, I appreciate your coming. In fact, if I can check into this program a little more, I think I might have an answer to the question of who's been threatening me."

"Dr. Fields, it's already past 7:00," called a female voice.

Shayne turned to see a black-haired woman whose skin was the color of cafe au lait. She had high-cheekbones, deeply-set eyes, and thin lips.

"Hello," she said, "I am Maria Adele, Professor Fields' teaching assistant."

"Splendid, Maria," said the academician as he got up. "You can

occupy Mr. Shayne whilst I try to chisel the theories of Sigmund Freud on the foreheads of a most recalcitrant band of graduate students. I shall see you again at 8:30, Mr. Shayne."

Ordinarily Shayne wouldn't have minded being left in the company of an extraordinarily beautiful woman, but he had wanted to ask Fields some things about one Victor De Leon as well as the professor's high-class apartment. Through the window behind her he could see the full moon rising. Devil's Moon, some oil-riggers he had once worked with called it.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Shayne?" she said. "Professor Fields has explained to me about coming to see you. You know he is a very scared man."

"You mean even without his phobia?"

"Yes. He has led a cloistered existence for the last few years."

Shayne picked up a bound volume labelled THE SWANN FOUNDATION: SOME GUIDELINES that was sitting beside the still-glowing terminal. "He was starting to tell me something about this computer program."

She reached behind the keyboard and shut it off. "Bless his soul, he's always leaving these things on. All I know is that it's some kind of research grant he brought with him to the University. Sorry I can't be much help."

The redhead put the book down. "Maybe you could . . ." He paused. "On second thought, why don't I come back at 8:30."

"Whatever you wish. If you don't mind, then, I have some quizzes of his to grade. Can I . . ."

"I'll go for a walk. I've got some old memories, friends on campus."

SHAYNE GLANCED DOWN AT HIS SEIKO. NEARLY 8:30. HE was standing beside the Buick where he had been for the last hour or so. He had been able to move, to make himself retrace his short history with Susan.

He squashed the Camel beneath his loafers and started forward. A figure he recognized came out of Carroway Hall. Maria Adele stopped, looked around, spotted him, and walked directly toward him. Her heels echoed on the cement sidewalks.

"Mr. Shayne, I'm so glad I found you," she said breathlessly. "Professor Fields got out of class a few minutes ago and got right on his computer. He's certain he's on to something you . . ."

Her final words were drowned by a huge explosion.

Shayne looked over her shoulder in disbelief as the academic building from which she had just come began to collapse in instant flames.

VI

THE LOW-HANGING DEVIL'S MOON SEEMED TO SHAYNE to be laughing at him, and the echo of the explosion rang in his ears.

"*Madre Dios*," Maria Adele screamed as she turned to see Carroway Hall burst apart. "Professor Fields, he's still inside."

She started toward the disintegrating building, but the redhead grabbed her arm and said, "Is anybody else in there?"

"No, his is the only class tonight. He dismissed them fifteen minutes ago and told me to lock up on my way out."

"You wait here," he commanded.

Shayne hustled toward the building. The two-story structure, already a mound of concrete and intermittent flames, reminded the redhead of the Liberty City tenements after the recent riots.

As he ran, his mind fixed on one thing. The explosion had had a familiar ring that told him the destruction of Carroway Hall had not resulted from a faulty boiler or a careless match. Right now he'd have made book that the gutted building had been fire-bombed.

Sirens sounded in the distance, and a crowd of students began to gather. The detective couldn't get within fifty feet of the rubble. Whoever had torched the building knew his job. Fields and his records were both gone.

Shayne stopped and, looking back at Maria Adele's wide eyes, shook his head. The dark-haired woman opened her mouth to reply, but the shriek was lost in the blaze of the fire and the shouts of the curious crowd.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE LAST FIRE ENGINE ALLOWED the Buick an avenue. As Shayne pulled away from the curb, he felt the old fear dropping steadily down into his gut.

Another case, another death.

The police had found a lump of charred and mangled flesh. It gave the redhead little comfort that as Maria Adele had said as she left long ago that at least the professor wouldn't have to face his fear again. Academia, Liberty City, Purgatorio. The joker on the radio was right—the Grim Reaper was the Magic City's only truly permanent resident.

What made Shayne even sicker was that he had failed a client. His life threatened, Fields had come to him for help, and he had misread the situation. Twice in his life on this very spot, once now and once when Susan had been killed, he had been unable to protect somebody who had counted on him. Death had just walked past him and taken what it wanted.

Shayne could live with a lot of things—failure wasn't one of them.

The redhead stabbed the brake and looked back. Smoke from the charred remains drifted up and across the face of the Devil's Moon.

"You've had your sacrifice," he said half-aloud to the sickly-yellow glow. Silently he vowed that this case was priority one. For this death somebody was going to pay. Yeah, he had taken this one personally, and he was going to collect that debt in full.

The big detective started up with a defiant screech, then pointed the Buick toward Flagler Street. He didn't know if he should have stayed with Maria Adele more to comfort her or to find out if she knew anything about what had happened. She had been insistent that she needed to be alone. Well, he could see her later.

Right now he had an unscheduled appointment with a certain overweight detective. Reid was the only sure link in the Fields case.

By the time Shayne reached Reid's office, which was six blocks down Flagler from his own, he was determined to get some answers from the detective, even if he had to pound the doughboy into beaten biscuits.

Like his own, the fat man's office was located in a second-floor walk-up. The single bulb in the hallway blurred the chipped, gilded lettering on the frosted glass. It didn't matter. Even if the letters had been distinct, they'd have spelled out the same thing to Shayne—a sleazy dick who gave the profession a bad name.

The wooden door was unlocked. Guys like Reid, the rawboned detective knew, were always in, waiting for a call from a greedy spouse or a visit from a repo company. If the bucks were right—and they always were—the fat man would take the job.

"Reid," he called.

The only response was the whine of a fan that was scattering paper across the rugless floor.

A trickle of red on the dusty hardwood caught Shayne's eye. He followed the trail back behind the cluttered desk.

Chester Reid had peeped through his last keyhole.

SOMEBODY HAD FOUND A NEW USE FOR AN OLD LETTER-opener. Like an obscene hood ornament, the naked torso of a woman protruded from Reid's back.

Carefully Shayne avoided the blood. It was still wet. Somebody had paid a visit to Chet Reid recently. The fact that there was only one way into the second-floor office, the way he had come in, and that the weapon was stuck in the back, suggested strongly to the detective that Reid had known the killer, had not been afraid to turn his back.

Who could have offed the cheap detective? That was like asking, is

Disneyworld crowded? Reid was the type whose friends could fill a closet and his enemies the Orange Bowl. Had some guy who didn't like being an in-the-flesh focal point of a 5x7 glossy at the Hot Sheet Motel decided to pay back the photographer? Still, most of the people Reid dealt with would have used something less subtle—like a double-barrel twelve-gauge.

The Devil's Moon smiled through the smudged office window. Sure, Shayne told himself, Chet Reid had been a low-life, but he had also been a human life. And as much as the redhead hated to admit it, they *did* work the same side of the street.

Maybe the ends weren't so far apart after all.

THE LONG MONDAY HAD NEARLY EXPIRED AS SHAYNE pulled into the almost-empty parking lot of the Beef House. After he had called the Metro Police, he had donned a pair of gloves and made a quick search of the joint. Nothing. There was no secretary's desk, and the battery of file cabinets on the far wall had been nothing but an empty facade containing only a half-filled bottle of Martell. Reid's only real office, as a Jewish friend of the detective's liked to say, was in his socks.

In a strange way the redhead was glad to see the trio of Shaw, Kroger, and their giant bottle still in the corner. Now he had a personal reason to drink with them. Two reasons, for that matter.

"Move over," he said as he pulled a chair to the table and straddled it backwards.

"I thought you had some place to go," said Deke Shaw.

"Yeah, and I've been there," said Shayne, shoving an empty glass toward the watering hole.

Kroger poured the rye.

"Here's to death," said the redhead sarcastically. "May its appetite finally be sated."

The two men stared at Shayne.

"What happened to you tonight?" said Kroger.

"Tonight," answered Shayne, "I go to see not one, but two men killed."

"Who?"

"A small-time private eye named Reid and a professor out at Florida American named Fields."

Kroger looked at him askance. "Is that last guy a psych teacher?"

"Was," answered the redhead. "How did you know?"

"Maybe we should all sing a chorus of 'Small World'," said Kroger.

"What are you talking about?" said the detective. "I don't follow

you."

"Jason Fields," said Kroger, "is the name of the doc who put me and Pete through those tests."

Shayne was curious. "What kind of tests?"

"Something to do with a profile of our personalities. Questions like, 'If your brother came at you with a gun you knew to be loaded, would you, a) Tell him he's crazy, etc.' We had to take them before we got to play the survival games."

"Hold it," said the redhead. "You mean you had to take some kind of test before they let you crawl around the mud and shoot each other? That's crazy."

"That's what I said," interrupted Shaw.

Kroger said, "That was their point. They wanted to be sure they didn't get any psychos playing war games."

"Show him the envelope, Kro," said Deke Shaw.

Kroger reached inside his coat pocket and pulled out a wadded-up envelope. From it he extracted a letter. "The organizers gave me this when I left the survival course late last night."

"What is it?" said Shayne.

"An invitation," said Kroger.

"He's been cordially invited to go down to Key West next weekend to see about a job," said Shaw.

Shayne pressed. "What kind of job?"

"It doesn't say."

"Why would you go down there when you've already got a job here?"

"Wouldn't you take a weekend off to claim the other half of this?"

Kroger held up half of a thousand-dollar bill. "Here, you want it?"

"You mean you're not going?"

"Hell, no!" said Kroger. "I've had enough survival games to last me a lifetime."

Shayne wouldn't have taken the offered bundle if his eye hadn't noticed the letterhead on the top of the stationery.

The Swann Foundation.

VIII

EARLY TUESDAY MORNING THE RED-EYED REDHEAD stumbled into the City Room of the Miami *Daily News*. His best friend from the night before had become his worst enemy, so Shayne promised himself the closest he was going to come to hard liquor from now on was ham on rye.

"Hey, fella," called the scarecrow figure in front of his VDT,

"didn't I step over you this morning down on Miami Avenue?"

"I think it was *on* me," said the detective, "you and the entire Chinese army."

"Try this." Tim Rourke filled a styrofoam cup from his Smurf thermos.

Without thinking Shayne took a quick sip. He knew then how a dipstick felt. "I see you changed the Ford's oil again."

"You ingrate. Juan Valdez handpicked each coffee bean for you, and this is the thanks he gets."

"Well, I guess if you put it that way." Shayne laughed. "Tim, I need your help."

"At your disposal," said the reporter. "I owe you after that last story you gave me. My West Coast editor doubled my pay after that jewel."

Shayne held his breath and took another swig of coffee. "What can you tell me about the Swann Foundation?"

The Irishman leaned forward and punched a couple of keys on his computer. He sat back for a moment, then watched the display screen. "Swann Foundation . . . non-profit organization . . . three years old . . . assets over twelve mil . . . likes to provide academic funding . . . heavy into psychological research."

"Where does their funding come from?"

Rourke hit another couple of keys. "Oh, this is interesting. It's channeled through a lot of intermediaries, but . . . hold on. Let me cross reference." The thin figure's fingers flew over the keyboard. "That does it. When all is said and done, one name keeps popping up."

"Don't keep me in suspense," said Shayne.

"Wrightman, C. Norris Wrightman."

"Voted most likely to succeed Howard Hughes as Reclusive Industrialist of the Decade."

"You're right on target." Rourke sat back in his chair. Crisscrossing the air with his hand, he said, "I can see it now—*Daily News* Reporter Wins Pulitzer for Expose of Wrightman Industries."

"Why an expose?"

"You really ought to take time to read the papers, shamus. A Senate Committee tried to subpoena him during their recent investigation of multinationals. Rumor is that WI is into everything from illegal munitions to influence peddling."

"What happened?"

"You can't subpoena what you can't find. Last fall, the elusive Mr. Wrightman disappeared."

"Thanks, Tim," said the redhead as he got up to leave.

"Wait a minute, Mike," Rourke said, grabbing his rumpled raincoat. "Twenty cents a word for fiction is one thing, but a Pulitzer for investigative journalism is another. I'm tagging along on this one."

ROURKE SAT DOWN BEFORE THE TERMINAL. "NOW TELL me what you want, shamus."

"When Carroway Hall blew up last night, I thought Fields' records went with his computer; but this morning seeing you punch up information on your VDT gave me a hunch. The professor's unit was a micro, and maybe it was connected to the University's central computer."

"What did you say to that Dean Culross guy to get us in here on his terminal? I knew you had some pull, but not in the halls of academe."

Shayne looked across the walnut-paneled office. "The people around here were grateful when I kept the school's name out of the papers last year. You remember that white slavery ring I broke up. It was run by one of their part-timers."

"Hand me that access code the Dean wrote down for you," said Rourke.

The redhead gave him the slip of paper. The reporter tapped the keys deftly. A list of names began to scroll down the screen.

"Bingo! You want a printout?" asked the reporter.

"Sure."

While the printer chattered away, Rourke said, "That's strange. Look at the top of the screen. Professor Fields has been working on this project for four months, and all we're going to get is two pages of printout. If I were the funder of this grant, right about now I'd be worrying I was being taken."

Shayne tore off the fanfold paper when the printer stopped. There were two lists of names, one headed PASS and the other FAIL.

The thin reporter said, "Looks like course grades to me."

The redhead scanned the list. In the PASS category he saw both Lorca's and Kroger's names, and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt Kroger had never gone past high school. If Bernie the Book were present, the big detective would have placed his second bet of the case. What he was looking at were the results of what Kroger had told him about, the personality profiles.

The question was now—what did it take to pass the test?

Before they left the Dean's office, Shayne obtained one more access code. "It's for Personnel," he told Rourke. "Look up A-D-E-L-E, Maria. I need a home address."

Rourke struck the keyboard again, paused, and started over.

"What's wrong?" said Shayne.

The lanky Irishman shook his head. "Shamus, I hate to disappoint you, but according to these records, no Maria Adele has either worked here or taken classes."

AS ROURKE HAD A STAFF MEETING HE FELT HE COULDN'T miss, Shayne dropped him off at the *Daily News*. After a stop by the morgue where he learned that the body found in Carroway Hall had been burned "totally beyond identifying," he placed a mobile call to Lucy.

"You'd better come in quick, Michael."

"Why, Angel?"

"There's a woman here who says she has to talk with you and only you. She claims it's very important and has to do with the case you're working on."

"Who is she?"

"That's just it. She won't give her name."

SHAYNE WAS SURPRISED WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR TO his Flagler Street office. Sitting on the couch that needed upholstery was a woman who, despite the rivulets through her heavy makeup, the redhead recognized.

The tired blonde he had seen Sunday night at De Leon's place, the one Chet Reid had called Nadine.

IX

TAKING THE WET TOWEL FROM THE DIRTY BLONDE, LUCY Hamilton handed her a cup of her special Louisiana coffee.

"Thanks," said the woman as Shayne's secretary departed, closing the door to the redhead's office behind her.

The big detective could see the blonde who had moved to the straightback was extremely self-conscious. She kept glancing around, pulling her too-short dress down over her knees and fidgeting with an oversized beaded purse.

"What can I do for you, Miss . . . ?" inquired the redhead.

"LeFleur, Nadine LeFleur. It's about Chester."

"Reid. You were with him the other night at Purgatorio."

"I was with Chester long before that. I worked as his secretary till he couldn't scrape up enough cash to pay me. So I kicked around, finally landed a job at De Leon's club. See this hair. It wasn't always blonde. When I worked for Chester, it was brunette."

"I see."

"I know what a lot of people thought about Chester. A two-bit private dick that'd sell his soul if the price was right. They didn't understand. He was a good man. He only took those jobs because he wanted so bad to make it as a P.I. Table scraps, the cases nobody else would touch, but he figured somebody had to help the poor slobs."

Shayne offered her a Camel. She took it. "Chester's brand," she said as the redhead lit it for her. "Funny thing. There was one guy Chester always looked up to. Bought his cigarettes, drank his liquor. Even though a bum like Chester couldn't afford it, he got himself a Flagler Street office." A tear formed in the corner of each eye.

The redhead now had a good idea why Reid had saved his bacon the other night.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed, "I ever got him that job for De Leon. It was supposed to be a simple tail, and it got him killed."

As her tears began to flow, the redhead gave her his handkerchief.

"Yesterday afternoon," she continued after a while, "Chester went by the University and talked to Fields. I know this because I called Chester last night and tried to warn him."

"Warn him. About what?"

"Around suppertime I overheard that pig Victor talking on the phone to someone he called Pajaro. From what I could make out, this Pajaro believed Chester was trying to betray De Leon. The last thing that Hispanic pig said to his caller was 'kill him.'"

She buried her face in the handkerchief. "Chester was afraid he was going to die, so last night he dropped something by my apartment."

"What?"

She pulled a large manila envelope from her purse and pushed it across the desk to the redhead. Scribbled across the package were the words **IN THE EVENT OF MY DEATH, GIVE THIS TO MY BUDDY, MIKE SHAYNE.**

The redhead opened the envelope. Inside was a thick computer print-out. The first page bore the heading **THE SWANN FOUNDATION.** Beneath it was a title, "Psychometric Profiles." He skimmed the report. Each page had a number at the top and a series of percentage scores. Why had a man who feared for his life given it to him? Reid's last request didn't make much sense.

Another question troubled the redhead. Earlier that day when Tim Rourke had tapped into the same account, he had found totally different information. Were both reports labeled **THE SWANN FOUNDATION** from the same computer file? If so, why the discrepancy?

"Miss LeFleur," he began as he studied the printouts, "you need to

go to the police with what you told me.”

When he got no answer, Shayne looked up.

The blonde had vanished.

SHAYNE SWUNG BY THE *DAILY NEWS* TO SEE ROURKE. Discovering that the reporter was still in his staff meeting, the redhead left three things—the printout from FAU, the package Reid had bequeathed him, and a note that read SEE IF YOU CAN FIGURE THESE OUT.

For the third time since this case had started, the detective headed to the Beef House. This time his purpose for going there was more than refreshment. In the late-afternoon crowd he found Kroger and Shaw had a head start on the happy hour.

As Shayne walked toward the two men, the big detective had already decided what he had to do.

“Seen any good murders lately, Shayne?” slurred Kroger.

“No,” said the redhead, “but I’ve got an idea how to end some of the killing.” He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the envelope they had given him the previous night. “I’m going to take you up on that offer.”

“What offer?”

“I’m going down to the Keys this weekend as Mel Kroger.”

“You’re what?” said Kroger.

“I’m taking your place.”

“Why?” said Shaw.

“There’ve been three murders in two days, and the answer lies in the Keys. I need your help, Mel.”

“How?”

“Let me borrow your wallet for a day. I’ve got a friend who, if he isn’t in jail, can duplicate your driver’s license and credit cards.”

Kroger yanked out his wallet. “If it’ll help you get whoever killed Pete, be my guest.” He took out his cash. “Your friend can’t duplicate this green, can he?”

“Not unless he wants to play a return engagement at Raiford,” Shayne quipped. “One thing that could spoil this plan—did they ever take your picture during the survival games?”

“Naw. I don’t think some of the guys would like it known that’s how they spend their weekends,” said Kroger. He tossed his wallet across the table. Landing, it opened to a couple of pictures inside the clear plastic holders. One of the photos in particular caught the redhead’s trained eye.

“Who’s that?” said Shayne, pointing to a dark-haired woman

leaning against a dark man he recognized as Pete Lorca.

"The four of us. Pete and me and our dates bowling."

"The girl?"

"That's Maria. Pete's girl, or used to be."

Shayne didn't mention that the dark-haired woman was also Dr. Fields' assistant, the one whose address the computer couldn't find—Maria Adele. "Do you know anything about her?"

"No," said Kroger. "I don't even remember hearing her last name mentioned. Just some *chica* he was close to."

One more string, thought Shayne, that seemed to be tying all this together. But what did the finished package look like?

SHAYNE WAS STILL PONDERING THE QUESTION LATER that evening when he walked into his hotel-apartment to find the phone ringing.

"Shamus?"

"Tim."

"Sorry I took so long getting back to you. I wanted to be thorough, though, because the old Irish proboscis smells a big story. I took all of that stuff you left at the office to a psychologist friend of mine who's also a consultant to the MBPD."

"And?"

"Hold onto your hat. At the bottom of the envelope I found something you may have overlooked, a series of questions. Each paper with a number on top was a profile of a different individual. We collated those numbers with those on the PASS-FAIL list. There was a correspondence in one area. You want to take a wild guess what all those guys in the PASS category have in common?"

"Shoot."

"Real close. According to their personalities, they are all highly susceptible, capable of being trained to kill."

X

"MEL KROGER" ARRIVED IN KEY WEST SHORTLY AFTER noon on Friday. Shayne had taken his time driving through the familiar territory down Route 1, even stopping at the Holiday Inn in Key Largo to see the original boat Bogie had used in *The African Queen*.

According to the letter in his coat pocket, the redhead was due at the Taylor Marina, slip 7, at 6:00 PM. As the southernmost city in the nation was in the midst of celebrating Conch Republic Days, Shayne, deciding to avoid the bed races and other tourist promotions, headed for Fort Zachary Taylor. He enjoyed wandering through the reproduc-

tion of the real thing that had been used in both the Civil and Spanish-American Wars.

Later, he sat down at a sidewalk cafe in the artist's colony not far from where Papa Hemingway had once lived. He ordered a draft, then asked the waiter, "What's this Conch Republic stuff? It new?"

"Started two years ago. The Feds and State Police put up a roadblock to search for illegal aliens and drugs. Caused enormous traffic delays. Bunch of prominent people decided we ought to secede from the Union and create the Conch Republic. Course some folks are more serious about secession than others, but it's a nice tourist gimmick."

Halfway through the waiter's answer, the redhead had stopped listening. Walking down the opposite side of the street was a man he recognized from Purgatorio.

Luis, the guy with the big mouth who had been betting against De Leon.

What was the Hispanic doing on Key West? Whatever the answer, the redhead's neck began to bristle. Something big was going down.

Shayne paid for the draft and on a whim decided to kill some time by following Luis. The short Hispanic, also uninterested in bed races and the International Chug-a-lug Contest, headed toward the docks.

When Luis stopped behind some packing crates, the redhead decided the Hispanic wasn't there to feed the fish. The big detective had been staring around a green panel truck for about fifteen minutes at his quarry when he was conscious of a noise behind him.

As he turned, a blanket smothered him, and a shoulder knocked him to the pavement. His head struck something hard, and he felt consciousness ebbing.

THE SMELL AND THE STEADY JOSTLE TOLD THE REDHEAD he was in some kind of moving vehicle. He blinked. Bright lights pressed against his pupils. He raised his head.

He was inside a huge RV surrounded by a lot of high-tech equipment. Some guys in rolled-up white shirts and low-slung ties were sitting around a table. Recognizing one of them, the rawboned redhead knew why he wasn't bound.

The menacing growl of the obvious leader belonged to a man Shayne had hoped he would never again encounter—Garland Hartford Ragland, the Chief of Narcotics Investigation for Dade County.

"Sorry about the accident, Shayne," said Ragland, noting the redhead had joined the world of the conscious. "They were just supposed to bring you to me."

"You got any more fairy tales?" said the detective.

"Shayne, I really don't give a damn whether you believe me or not. All I want you to tell me is why whenever we meet you're in the middle of my op."

"What operation? A guy comes down for a little holiday, and you rough him up. No wonder the natives want to secede."

"I guess you're going to tell me Luis Sanchez was leading you to a clambake."

"Who's Luis Sanchez?"

Showing surprising speed Ragland stood up and splintered his straight back chair with his stiff leg. "You remember what I told you about this wooden leg of mine?"

Shayne lit up a Camel.

"That's right, Red. I can still kick ass."

Shayne blew out some smoke. "Suppose I *am* down here on a case."

"I don't give a damn if your proctologist sent you down here to give your hemorrhoids a tan. You're in the way, and you know what I do to people in the way."

The redhead had an instant vision of the last time he had seen the Chief Narc. Ragland's M.O. in dealing with drug traffickers was always the same—"When in doubt, take them out!" The Fed had offed a dealer without the slightest hint of remorse. In fact, the only hint was of pleasure. Shayne decided fast. "I'll tell you what I know, and you tell me what I'm getting into—deal?"

"Why not? I've only been working on Operation Skyhook for six months. Why shouldn't I compromise it for some \$400-a-day gumshoe?"

"Have it your way."

"I always do, but in this case you've got something we need."

"What?"

"That letter in your coat pocket inviting you to take a little boatride. Do you know where you're headed tonight?"

"A pleasure cruise to the Bahamas?"

"Not quite. *Cayo Muerte*, and in case your Spanish is rusty, that's Death Key, a little island south of the coast owned by . . ."

"C. Norris Wrightman."

"So you know about Mr. Big Bucks."

"Only that he's been funding the Mercenary Olympics, and he's invited a few good men out to his place for fun and games."

"We tried to infiltrate the Survival Game, but our man disappeared. I'd love that envelope of yours."

"But you don't have time to make up the proper I.D.'s to go with the letter."

Shayne knew that from Ragland silence was almost a compliment. Then the Fed spoke up. "What's your interest in all this?"

The redhead hesitated, then looked at his Seiko. 5:10. He had to make a decision fast. Ragland's methods might be brutal, but Miami's Chief Narc probably knew enough to give the detective a slight edge where he was going. "O.K., I'll play ball with the home team. A client of mine had his life threatened and later was killed. The trail to the killer led in two different directions."

"One was Wrightman. The other?"

"Victor De Leon."

"Makes sense," said Ragland. "In the last month alone over a hundred deaths can be traced to one thing—those two's not-so-private war."

"Who's trying to move in on who?"

"For the last three years De Leon has been the local Old King Coke, but about six months ago Wrightman decided to diversify. He stole De Leon's pipe, then his bowl, even knocked off his fiddler's three. Actually it was more like forty-three."

"So Wrightman wanted more than a first-class seat on Bogota Airways," said Shayne.

"Wouldn't you like to own a business that controlled 50% of all the coke and 60% of all the grass that comes into the good ole US of A? Hell, the Federal Reserve Bank in Atlanta has been running a six billion dollar surplus because of all the drug profits stuck in Florida's commercial banks. That's beaucoup NarcoBucks."

Shayne had to admit the figures surprised even him. "What can I do?"

"Wrightman's doing something out on that island that involves drugs, guns, who knows what else," said the narc. "Something big. We can't get a man in or a view from the sky."

"So you want me to go in for you?"

"That's about the size of it."

"One thing. What's De Leon's precise role in Wrightman's little game?"

"He wants to shut it down. That's why he's got a lot of goons like Sanchez hanging around, trying to find out what's going on out in the gulf. Hell, between you and me I wouldn't mind watching all those scum blow each other away out on Wrightman's hideaway, but I'm afraid something's going to happen right here, right in the height of the tourist season. I don't want to see a lot of innocent people get hurt. I don't want Key West to end up being what its name originally meant. *Cayo Hueso*, Island of Bones."

THE GLOW OF *CAYO MUERTE* WAS VISIBLE TO SHAYNE from the bow of the cabin cruiser. As "Mel Kroger" the redhead knew he was in the second of five boats heading to the island. At 6:00 he and about twenty others had shown their letters and identification to a trio of white shirts on slip 7 before being herded aboard. The men all mingled on deck, but no one said a word. From the looks of them, Shayne decided it wouldn't take much training for them to be capable of killing. Some of them looked like they had already passed the course with straight A's.

The big detective glanced at his watch and depressed a button. Like a magnetic needle, the hour hand pointed SSW, indicating the buoy Ragland told him had been planted off-shore for their agent who had been killed.

"Use the watch as a compass," the narc had explained. "If you can swim to the buoy, turn the blue cover one-quarter turn. That'll activate a homing device and we'll come get you."

Floodlights hit the ChrisCraft. As the cabin flashed Morse Code, Shayne memorized the recognition signal.

When the boat docked, the redhead felt as if he were entering Fort Bragg again. Armed guards patrolled as far as the eye could see beneath a canopy of camouflage netting.

A green-fatigued swagger stick lined them all up. "Gentleman," he said, holding up half of a thousand dollar bill, "you can claim this and get right back on the boat no questions asked. Or, you can stay here, and by just doing what comes naturally to you make over ten times that amount before the weekend's over."

"What'a we got to do for the ten grand?" said the guy next to Shayne.

"Keep your mouth shut and follow orders."

"How do we know we're gonna be around to collect?" said another.

"That was the real purpose behind the survival games and the testing. You people are survivors."

"We gonna have to shoot anybody?"

"If you do," answered the swagger stick, "your gun'll be firing more than paint pellets."

"If I'm going to put my life on the line," said Shayne, "I want to see who I'm working for."

The leader pointed to a large, dimly-lit tower two-hundred yards from the beach. "The man up there sees you—you don't see him. Enough jawing. Anybody staying take one step forward."

Seventeen men including Shayne did.

The other three were given their money and put back on the boat,

which immediately departed northerly toward Key West. At the edge of the light, it suddenly stopped. Shayne heard three bursts from an M-16, then three splashes. The boat returned to its mooring.

Leaving the island, the redhead didn't have to be told, was an offer they should have refused.

IN THE NEXT TWO HOURS SHAYNE FELT LIKE HE HAD been inducted. He was issued a green uniform, an I.D., an M-16, and a pack. After a short meal he was assigned to a position on the island's perimeter. The red-head noticed that each new recruit was teamed with a pair of vets.

When they arrived at their destination, a piece of rough coral that jutted out into the sea, Shayne offered his two companions a cigarette. After a while he said, "The guys on the boat said we were going to see some action. We gonna spend the whole weekend watching the tide roll in?"

"Yeah, if we're lucky."

Continuing his gung-ho role, Shayne pressed, "I didn't train all these years to watch my weapon rust."

"Hey, Cliff," said the man on Shayne's right as he lit up the cigarette, "you really think that De Leon's gonna try to stop the dispersal?"

"I hope so, Donnie. We're ready for that greasy bastard."

"What's being dispersed?" said Shayne.

"Enough white powder to cover Aspen for a season."

"Whew," said Shayne.

"Scuttlebutt has it tonight's the night. Turn on the radio, Cliff."

Cliff said, "One of the cook's swears you're right."

"It figures," said Donnie, "what with all the extra help."

"What figures?" said Shayne.

"For a couple of months the man in the tower's been bringing in Colombian Gold anyway he could. Submarine, trawler, banana boat. Right now there's enough coke and grass on this island to keep New York City high a month. Tonight, I guess, the flotilla comes to take it to the mainland."

Dr. Death's deep voice boomed from the radio over the splashing surf.

"Every night that jerk comes on with news about the latest shipment."

"Yeah," said Donnie, "everybody thinks he's nothing but a 50,000-watt wacko with a crazy rap. Crazy, like a fox."

"Wait a minute," said Shayne. "You mean that DJ's really been

shelling out delivery times and places?"

"It's better than synchronizing your watches. We got paid-off Coast Guard people who got to be alerted, guards, distributors, middle men. Hell, this is the big leagues. Everybody tunes in to Dr. D and goes where he says."

"Tonight's score ought to drive the competition out of competition. Imagine all this pure stuff flooding the market at cut-rate prices. You'll be able to buy a nickle bag for a nickle. How long before you think De Leon's network will be wiped out?"

"According to the Doc," said Donnie, flipping off the radio, "the shipment's due to leave this island at 3:00 AM tonight."

Shayne glanced at his watch. Less than four hours. He had to get to the buoy. That meant taking out his new but loose-lipped comrades-in-arms.

The redhead waited twenty minutes till they made their hourly report over their walkie-talkie that all was well with Blue Station.

"What's that?" said Shayne, pointing down at Donnie's feet.

"What's what?" said the mercenary.

"There." Shayne pointed again.

Donnie got down on one knee to examine the coral.

The redhead rammed the M-16's butt into the base of the guard's skull. The struck figure pitched forward. Cliff came running toward Shayne. "What the . . .?"

The detective caught the soldier of fortune just below the chin, sending him reeling backwards.

To Shayne's amazement, Cliff regained his balance and came forward again. His M-16 started to rise toward the redhead's midsection.

The detective knew the gunfire would give him away. More importantly, a burst of fire at this range would saw him in two.

Grabbing the muzzle of his piece like a baseball bat, Shayne swung quickly. The butt of his weapon clanged against Cliff's rifle, launching it into the silence of the water.

Cliff whipped his bayonet from his sheath. "You bastard. I don't know who you are, but when I get through carving you, nobody else will."

The detective crouched, holding his weapon in a defensive position. Cliff lunged.

Shayne dodged and thrust the M-16 upwards.

His opponent's hand stabbed between the rifle and its webbed sling. Shayne twisted violently.

Cliff winced as the redhead swung him around.

The knife clattered to the coral.

Shayne ended Cliff's awkward imitation of a whirling dervish with a roundhouse right.

THE HEAVING WATER WAS COOL IN THE NIGHT AIR. Shayne's muscles, already tired from the fight, strained against the tropical current. He stole a glimpse at the watch Ragland had given him. It was almost midnight. Three hours until the drug flotilla landed. Right now the command would be nervous because Blue Station was off the air at its hourly check-in.

He depressed the button in his watch. The hour hand swung straight ahead. He had had to swim more than a mile, making a large dog-leg left from his beach post. Even in his tip-top condition the redhead wondered if he could make it to the buoy in the dark, cold water with the tide seemingly against him.

Shayne depressed the button again. The hour hand spun wildly. He knew he was close. Then he spotted it. A turquoise buoy about the size of a beach ball bobbed atop the crests.

The detective wrapped his arm around it and turned the dark blue cover one-quarter turn.

Then he waited.

This was the first time he had paused to ponder the situation. The whole case had been a constant blur of activity propelling him from one confrontation to another. Even in the present coldness he welcomed a chance to stop and think.

From a seemingly simple request to help a teacher in distress to being caught in the middle of a war between two of Miami's biggest cocaine cowboys. *Yeah, you've come a long way, Mike Shayne*, he told himself.

Gunfire erupted from the direction of *Cayo Muerte*. The distant glow suddenly brightened.

They had probably discovered why Blue Station had failed to make its hourly check-in.

To his back he heard a low hum. Ragland was making good on his promise. And none too soon.

In the midst of the moonless night he spotted a low-slung craft skimming the water toward him. Not twenty yards away, the motor stopped and the boat began to sidewash toward him. He couldn't discern the figures aboard.

Closer it came.

He looked up. A light blinded him, but not so much that he couldn't make out the steel barrel of an M-16 trained at his head.

XII

THE BLACK BARREL PROBED THE HEAVY AIR. THEN Shayne heard the low-pitched voice. "Well, if you ain't the ugliest mermaid in the sea. Throw him back, Avery."

It was Ragland.

Shayne grabbed the rifle barrel and was pulled aboard. Someone threw a blanket over him as the boat took off.

"This thing's fast," said the redhead as he removed his wet clothes.

"It ought to be," said the federal agent. "We've confiscated it from De Leon three times, and he's bought it back at auction twice. Now, what've you got?"

The detective explained what he had learned on the island fortress.

When he had finished, Ragland looked down at his watch. "3:00 PM. Shit, that's a little more than two hours away. I can't possibly get an army together by then."

Shayne stopped toweling off his hair. "Don't tell me I'm going to pull the DEA bacon out of the fire again."

"Don't be a comedian, Red."

The redhead pulled a cigarette out of Ragland's pocket and waited until the narc lit it up. "Now I'm going to explain to you Mike Shayne's Thanksgiving Principle—how to kill two turkeys with one axe."

SHAYNE PUSHED THE BUTTON FOR THE ELEVATOR TO THE penthouse suite at Key West's newest hotel, the Blue Coral. He had been allowed access when he told the voice on the intercom his business.

Two white suits frisked him roughly as he stepped out of the elevator. The baldheaded man in the expensive linen shirt motioned for him to come forward.

"Mr. Card, or should I now say Shayne, why is it you must see me now?" said De Leon. "It is almost 2:00, a time when most men sleep."

"When you snooze, you lose," said the redhead. "You have to act fast to get what you want."

"What is it I want?"

"To destroy Wrightman's operation on *Cayo Muerte*."

De Leon's thick eyebrows raised. "How is it you know this?"

"I made it my business to find out after Wrightman killed my best friend," the redhead lied. "Chet Reid."

"Ah, Mr. Reid, a good man. Then you really were working with him."

"Let's say we had a partnership that was untimely dissolved."

THE COLD SURF SPRAYED THE REDHEAD'S FACE. HE glanced at his watch. 2:45. On both sides of his craft Shayne spotted the shadowy shapes of other boats.

"My gun is always in your back," said De Leon.

Shayne nodded. De Leon had leapt at the bait like a hungry hammer-head. His Hispanic force, who had all been quartered in the Blue Coral, had found it easy to overpower Wrightman's unsuspecting boat crews. The protective army had been concentrated on the island. The flotilla's job was simply to pick up the drugs and scatter.

Pajaro?" he said, half-turning.

From a door stepped a dark-haired woman whom Shayne recognized.

"My daughter, Maria," said De Leon.

"We've met," said the redhead, looking at the dark-complexioned beauty he had known as Maria Adele, Jason Fields' assistant.

"Oh, yes," said De Leon. "Maria told me you came by the University almost spoiling her assassination of Wrightman's lackey, Fields."

"So you planted the bomb," Shayne said to her.

De Leon answered. "She was trained well by our Cuban friends, no?"

In the art of a thousand uses for letter-openers, thought Shayne.

"Yes," said Maria, "father planted me in the enemy camp."

"That's why you were with Pete Lorca," said the redhead.

"Senor Lorca was one of our most proficient purchases," said De Leon. "Since Maria understood the computer, she falsified his test results to get him a place on Wrightman's island."

"But somehow Wrightman found out and killed Lorca," said the detective.

"This is a clever man, father," said Maria.

"And resourceful as we found out the other night at Purgatorio," said De Leon.

"More clever and resourceful than you might think," said Shayne.

"I did what you couldn't. I got myself onto *Cayo Muerte*, and I can get you on, if you want."

"Why would you help us?" said the bald man.

"Revenge. I owe Wrightman. More importantly, you're going to make me a wealthy man."

De Leon hesitated.

"Take as long as you want to think about it," prodded the redhead, "but if you don't make a decision in the next fifteen minutes, you'll blow your chances for good."

Light flashed from the island.

"They want a counter-sign," said De Leon's captain.

"Signal back C-O-K-E," said Shayne, remembering the recognition code he had learned earlier.

"Permission granted to land," called back the captain after some time had passed.

"Prepare the men," ordered De Leon. "I'm going below to the radio. We move on my signal."

Shayne hung in the shadows as the giant landing was effected. De Leon had brought at least a hundred well-armed men. There was probably that number on the island. The redhead's immediate problem was two guys in t-shirts and red bandanas who stood behind him, each with a weapon trained on his back.

The redhead casually fired up a Camel. He drew deeply, turned slowly, and thrust it into the nearest man's eye.

The guy screamed.

The other looked toward his hurt friend.

Shayne brought his knee up swiftly. As the guy jerked forward, his gun exploded.

The redhead jumped over the railing of the docking craft.

As he surfaced, he heard someone from the darkness of the island. "It's a trick."

"Shoot the lights," a voice yelled.

A few quick strokes brought the redhead to a power boat. He pulled himself in.

Gunfire erupted, spoiling De Leon's coordinated attack and telling Shayne all had gone well so far.

The detective turned the key in the boat. The motor caught the first time. He cast off the rope, glad for the increasing darkness.

He rammed the speed control forward.

When he had pierced the darkness of the bay, he looked back.

Cayo Muerte was ablaze, living up to its name.

XIII

SHAYNE PACED NERVOUSLY ACROSS THE BOAT'S DECK.

"Shouldn't you move in now?" he said to the chief narc.

"Why? Let's give them a little more time to take good care of each other. Besides, we wouldn't want some bleeding-heart judge to dismiss their case on technicalities." Ragland threw down a shot of bourbon.

"One hundred and fifty bodies, dope spread all over the beach, and enough weapons to arm your basic El Banana Republic. You know, I think that might be enough to establish probable cause."

"You bastard," said the redhead; though against his will he saw a certain demented logic in the narc's reasoning.

"Let's drink to that," said Ragland, refilling Shayne's bourbon glass.

RAGLAND KICKED A MOVING BODY OFF THE BLOOD-stained dock. "Looked dead to me."

"Don't push me too far," said the redhead.

"Hey, Aubrey," said Ragland, "find Shayne a violin. You know, Red, you're gonna lose all those idealistic scruples some day, and you and me are gonna be good friends."

The redhead knew that their only chance for real friendship was if they both checked in at the Hotel Fire and Brimstone.

Amidst the dawn-lit carnage Shayne swung his gaze toward the tower. He had spotted sudden movement. A solitary figure was just stepping down from the ladder.

Ragland raised his .357. "You know what I see? One less case for our overworked judicial system to try."

The head fed never saw Shayne's right hand coming.

Shayne sprinted across the body-littered beach. The two armies had performed just as Ragland had predicted.

The khaki-clad government men, busy rounding up the survivors, didn't notice Shayne pursuing the shadowy figure from the tower toward a solitary pier. The pursued man leapt into a small speedboat. The redhead closed the distance, reaching the wharf just as the boat's motor coughed to life.

The boat started up.

Shayne jumped.

The figure hunched over the steering wheel caved in as his back was struck.

The redhead grabbed his shoulders, spun him around, and said, "It's daylight, Dr. Fields, time for you to go to sleep."

A hard right was the only lullaby necessary to finish the job.

"HOW'D YOU KNOW WRIGHTMAN AND FIELDS WERE one?" said a sore-jawed Ragland.

"At first I didn't," admitted Shayne, "even though I wondered how the poor professor could afford to live where he did. But when Reid's girlfriend told me that he had visited Fields at the University during the day, I really began to suspect my client's story about his phobia. Also, Fields had shown up at FAU about the time of a Senate investigation into Wrightman Industries. The University provided a good cover for a

man who wanted to disappear.”

“But how did he get a University position?”

“Men like Wrightman can get what they want, especially when they’re being pushed by one of the University’s biggest contributors, the Swann Foundation, owned of course by Wrightman Industries. Besides, don’t you read the newspapers? Universities are idealists who seldom check deeply into credentials.”

The narc shook his head. “Why did Wrightman, Fields, whoever, hire you?”

“He probably had the same opinion of me, that you do,” answered Shayne. “I wouldn’t cause him any trouble, and most likely I’d be a monkey wrench in De Leon’s machinery.”

“I get it,” said the fed, pushing the handcuffed professor/industrialist ahead of him. “He figured that a bulldog like you would sink your teeth into De Leon’s ass and not let go. That would make Wrightman’s little take-over easier to pull off.”

“Yeah, he was pretty smart. I’ll bet he was onto De Leon’s daughter, Maria, from the beginning. He let her think she was sneaking into his computer operation as the poor professor’s assistant. Isn’t that right, Doc?”

Ragland shoved the smiling professor toward the boat.

Shayne continued. “He let her plant one of her father’s men into the computer’s PASS profile. Then he had Lorca killed in the survival game to shake up De Leon’s organization a little more because they wouldn’t be able to figure out how Wrightman knew about their plot.”

“No wonder this guy’s a millionaire,” said Ragland.

“Letting Maria think she had killed the professor in the lab explosion was the final touch.”

“How did you know the body wasn’t his?”

“No body is ever burned totally beyond recognition unless it’s purposefully done that way. I figure Wrightman watched to see when Maria had set up his death and substituted a body he already had prepared so it couldn’t be identified. For all I know he killed the building’s janitor.”

“Is that right, scuz-ball?” said Ragland, holding the industrialist at arm’s length.

The prisoner offered nothing but a smile of superiority.

“You see that, Shayne,” growled Ragland. “The creep’s laughing in our faces because he knows his money and high-priced mouth-pieces will tip the scales of justice in his favor.”

Then surprisingly the narcotics chief let go of his hold on Wrightman, stepped back, and smiled.

A single shot disturbed the early-morning quiet.

Wrightman grabbed his chest and collapsed.

Ragland's .357 barked.

Shayne whipped around.

The prostrate figure of Maria De Leon on the beach jerked violently, then lay motionless.

Ragland holstered the huge weapon. "I knew I should have checked that broad more closely," he said flatly. "Damned if she didn't have a piece hidden on her somewhere."

Shayne's stomach heaved. He couldn't get off *Cayo Muerte* fast enough, but in truth he knew, as he never had before, that death was not an isolated island from which he could escape. Death was as much a part of his life as the air he breathed.

Someday he'd learn to live with it.

SHAYNE WALKED INTO THE BEEF HOUSE DELIBERATELY. He hadn't even called Lucy since his return. There was something he had to do first.

He bought the biggest and best bottle of bourbon the bar had in stock. "Pat, I'm going to tell you a story. Then I want you to do something for me."

"Anything, Mike," said the bartender. "Just name it."

"As long as the bottle lasts, give everybody who wants one a drink and tell them a little story, a story about a hell of a guy who never quite made it, a good friend of mine I never knew I had till it was too late." Shayne took the first drink. "Yeah, tell everybody the drinks are on my buddy, Chet Reid, and tell them friends are about all we have on the road to death." ●

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in another thrilling adventure.

DON'T MISS IT!

To Herman, kites were living, breathing things that could be hurt—and even killed!

I've Got You on a String

by VINCENT MC HARDY

"WATCH IT SWALLOW THE SUN," HERMAN BEASLY said to the children gathered around him.

The Chinese-dragon kite wagged its twenty-five segments up against the August sky. A puff of wind tickled life into its rice-paper skin. Herman let the silk cord ease through his gloved hand and let the kite follow the wind. It didn't matter to Herman he was forty-two and playing in a child's world. When the sun shone through the yellow black dragon and the wind hummed along the arched cord, he saw the world through a ten-year-old's eyes. He felt the same ripple of wonder he felt the first time he put kite to sky.

The neighborhood children knew. They weren't fooled by the old man's body the child wore.

"Never run with a kite," Herman said to the congregation. "If it needs a run to get up the sky's not willing. Put it away and try another. Respect the sky's wishes. It's been around a lot longer than anyone. It's seen the beginning of creation and will see the end. Just maybe, it is the end."

Herman looked up at his kite and chuckled to himself. Five young lungs remembered to breathe and pulled in some of that magic sky.

"What's it saying?" Billy Anderson said, listening to the silk cord hum.

"Why, can't you hear? It's saying hello. It's happy you've finally looked up." Herman flicked the cord, rattling the kite spine, punctuating his talk. "Just because you walk the earth don't let that stop you from flying. Use the kite to reach the sky."

Brenda McKenny squinted at the squirming dragon. "Why don't you let it go? It wants to fly away."

"Let it go? If I cut the string both our lives would end. The kite needs me to fly. I need the kite to hear the sky. Have you ever seen a kite severed from its string?"

Herman waited for a reply. The children shook their heads.

"It's not a pleasant sight. First it jumps up. The stored string energy gives a short sharp scream. Then nothing. It stops, mute. It wants to go back. It tries to grab the string but can't. The string has long since limped to the earth. The kite dies. It slices through the air, this way and that, without design. Depending on the wind it can fall for minutes or crash in seconds. A wrecked kite is good for kindling. Its flying days are over."

"Mr. Beasley, you can fix them. You can fix anything," Joan, the youngest, said.

"I could get them back in the air, Joan, but they never talk. The fall does something to them. It blunts their touch. The wind can tell where the repair is. It draws around the spot. The vibrations shift. The kite's face changes. My touch can feel only anger."

"My brother bought a thunderbird from K-Mart. It's fallen lotsa times. It doesn't have a scratch." Bill Laut looked at the ground.

"A store-bought kite is dead. It's a lie. Never been alive." Herman stopped flicking the string. "Do you think that the sky and the wind would have anything to do with plastic? Plastic is for wrapping garbage, not for touching the stars. Silk, bamboo, cotton, rice paper, cedar strippings, and rubber tree paste are the flesh that sing, that vibrate with a voice the sky hears. They've lived under the sun. They've been touched by the wind. Up in the sky they live again."

THE CHILDREN WATCHED THE KITE NIBBLE AROUND the sun. From a backyard fronting the field Hank Belord and Melvin Henslaw, Herman's neighbors, watched.

"I guess some people never grow up," Hank said while he pushed against the fence testing its strength.

"You're right about that," Melvin replied, nervously listening to his creaking fence. "That Herman is a simple one, harmless. He could have picked a troublesome hobby, like molesting those kids instead of flying kites with them."

Hank turned and rubbed his lower back along the fence top. "You never know. One of these days he might snap and grab. I wouldn't be surprised."

"No. Not him. He has a one track mind," Melvin said, backing off

the fence hoping to ease the pressure. "All he ever thinks, eats, sleeps about are kites. He must have hundreds of them. And he flies them all the time. Back in January he scared the hell out of me. I looked out the back window at the thermometer and saw this burning diamond-shaped flying saucer. It was over thirty foot long, glowing blue, and sectioned off in small squares. It was just sitting up two-hundred feet in the air. I was about to phone the cops when I noticed Herman out there with his car. When I got out there I could see the saucer was attached to his car by a cable. Herman said he was experimenting with cold weather flying and used this multi-celled box kite to test materials for stress."

"Well if I had a wife like his, I might want to lose myself in a hobby, but I wouldn't be chasing kites," Hank said.

"She is a shrew. I don't see how he stands her."

"Hard to tell. Some people crawl into a shell and like it there. I doubt if he really notices her that much."

The fence cracked and shifted two inches. Hank barely caught himself from tumbling down.

"Hell, I'm sorry, Mel. I'll replace it."

"No. It's not your fault. I should have made it stronger. If it wasn't you it would have been someone else."

"Thanks, Mel, you're a real friend."

"HERMAN. HERMAN, WHERE ARE YOU?" THE VOICE OF Gloria Beasley broke their contemplation of the wounded fence. From behind the garage walked a taut-faced, light-footed woman of thirty. Her body prematurely set at forty, she would look forty when she was eighty. Her ink black eyes twitched under eyebrows thinly plucked and exactly lined. They looked cut with a jeweler's knife.

"He's out in the field with the kids again," Hank said, watching her nylon-covered legs rub forward.

"You'd think he married those kites for all the time he spends with me." Gloria's Miami-tanned face crinkled against the sun's brightness.

"With legs like yours, Gloria, you must be quite a dancer. Why don't you and Herman come down to Reddings club tonight? Me and the missus will be there," Hank said.

"I haven't been dancing for ages. I'd love to. But do you think I'd be able to get Herman to do anything. I doubt it."

"Listen. If he doesn't want to come, so much the better. Let him play with his kites. Let them keep him warm. Come on and have some fun."

"I'll see what comes up." Gloria turned to the field. "Herman, come here."

Herman didn't hear.

"Mr. Beasley," Joan said, tugging his arm. "There's someone calling you."

He took one look and knew it was over. If he didn't, she'd come out and yell. The children would be upset.

Herman bent down and pulled out of his satchel a handful of parachutes.

"You see these. I'm going to give you all a treat."

The parachutes were thirty-six square inches, made of the thinnest paper and the finest thread. Four threads gathered in a knot. Below the knot was gently glued a hand carved fish scale hook. A fifth thread ran from the knot and around a piece of paper.

"I'm going to place this hook on the string. The wind will pull the parachute up. On the string just before the kite is a disk with a sharp edge. When the parachute hits, the hook will snap off and the parachute will fall. Now this piece of paper is a letter of credit. It's worth five dollars. You can go to the corner store and buy whatever you want. All you have to do is catch it."

With a gentle twang Herman sent the first one off, then the second, third . . .

The children scattered under the kite. The tissue puffs floated down from the impossibly tall dandelion, its head full of ripe seed.

"HOW CAN YOU DO THIS TO ME?" GLORIA SAID INTO THE hallway mirror. "It's bad enough you waste all that money on kites, but you insist on advertising your insanity to everyone. If you could have seen Hank and Melvin you'd be ashamed."

Herman walked through the kitchen and down the stairs to his workshop.

Gloria failed to find grey in her coal black hair. Most mornings she woke up expecting to find a head infested with grey. A grey hair for every dollar lost to his kites.

"Did you hear me?" she yelled, walking into the kitchen.

A sifting sound of cotton rubbing silk waited with her in the silence. Herman hung up the dragon next to the red hawk and the space Medusa. Down here the air held all manner of wonder. Hundreds of kites hung on lines. A multi-celled lion box kite stared down a cluster of bamboo swallow bow kites, while a flat six-foot warlord, boasting a waterfall of paper crepe hair, stood guard beside a wide pine work bench. The late afternoon sun warmed through the menagerie.

"Answer me," Gloria said as she landed on the top step.

"Hank and Melvin are good neighbors. They never bother me. I stay

out of their way. The arrangement suits all of us."

"They're laughing at you. If you don't care about yourself, think about me. They chuckle at me, snicker at the sight of us together. You've got to grow up. Get rid of those kites."

"Gloria, will you please stop." Herman sat down at the bench. He hadn't the strength to recite his well worn script standing. "You've got the house, money, clothing. You want for nothing. Why must you have my pleasure? Ever since I was a kid I've loved kites. Now that I have the time and the ability I'll have my pleasure."

"Your pleasure is it? Well I'm going out to have my pleasure. Don't wait up."

Walking by the hall mirror she glanced into it. A touch of red welled on her cheeks. Just the right touch for the dance floor, she thought. The parcel on the desk broke her concentration. It had arrived that morning for Herman.

"Here, Herman. Have this to keep you warm tonight."

Side-armed, the package skidded through the kitchen and down the stairs. Herman heard the door slam as he bent down. *Sao Paulo Brazil*, the postmark said. Gently slicing open the package he exposed the Morpho butterfly wings. In the filtered light they sparkled iridescent blue, shimmering near the edge of ultra violet. Gently he lay the wings on the bench. Overhead he picked out a skeletal butterfly frame twisted from a single strand of bamboo.

"You'll taste the wind again. This time with your brothers flitting beneath your feet."

Herman sat down for some uninterrupted pleasure.

"BUT MY HOW YOU MOVE," GLORIA SLURRED AT HANK. She managed to exit the car without bumping her head.

"Standing up is not my best position. Why don't you come over and I can show you some advanced steps." Hank held the car antenna.

"Ah yes. I remember the little missus is out for the weekend. And I distinctly remember you saying you were going out dancing with her tonight."

"I couldn't very well ask you out in front of Mel. Mel is a friend, but why tempt him with dangerous information."

"Now you're calling me dangerous. You were calling me a lot of things out on the dance floor, but not dangerous. Which is it to be?"

"I stand corrected. Potentially dangerous, if not handled correctly. You've got a lot to lose if Herman finds out."

"Herman. Why'd you mention that simp? I almost pushed him out of my blood tonight and you go and infect me again. I got him to marry

me. I got the house in my name. We've a joint account. There's nothing I don't have of him."

"That's right, tease, you've got everything that you want. But you don't have his kites. The poor damn fool has one escape."

Gloria straightened. "That's what I like about you. You let your gonads do the talking. There isn't a wrinkle on your face that doesn't tighten when you look at me. The missus is getting a bit old isn't she."

"She is well used, I'll grant you that. But you look unused. Herman keeps you well preserved."

"Herman does but others don't. I never get bored with a one-course meal. You might make an interesting entree or a small aperitif. Nothing I can't substitute for on my shopping list."

"O.K. There's no rush. You know where I am. When you get tired of trying to reel me in and out like one of Herman's kites, give me a call. I won't waste my energy on game playing, especially with someone who's as desperate as you."

Gloria turned. Her feet found the cinder walkway. She smiled as she turned the key. *Yes, it's good for us to understand each other. It makes for an interesting match. At least with Hank there'll be no surprises. He's so much like me,* Gloria mused, as she shut the door.

DARKNESS GRIPPED THE HOUSE. A FAINT GLOW REACHED out to Gloria from the kitchen and pulled her in. Herman was downstairs. The crack under the closed door gave him away.

"My man. My good man. Are you still up?" Gloria said, as she walked down into Herman's world.

Herman looked up from his butterfly kite. The bamboo rice paper construction burned with blue fire. The Morpho restlessly waited for the morning light.

"How was your night?"

Herman swiveled in his chair to face her. "I brought it to life. All the way from the jungles of Brazil these wings came. They could have crumbled into rot. They could have been lost to the sky forever. But I saved them. I've made them grander than they were in their other life."

He turned the kite into the lamp light, bursting blue over Gloria's flushed face. His eyes sparkled.

"I'm glad you had a good time, Herman. Because I had the most marvelous night of our miserable marriage. And I'm sure it's because you weren't there."

Herman let his eyes dull over. For a flickering moment he'd thought she might be interested.

"Good, dear," Herman said, quickly turning back to the bench. He

picked up some silk thread and started to weave a bridle.

"Hank had a grand time. He took me to Reddings. We danced our feet raw."

Swirling in pantomime dance, Gloria bumped into an overhanging kite. The room trembled with jiggling forms.

"Don't touch the kites. You'll hurt them." Herman jumped up at the horrid sound of bamboo clicking.

Gloria backed up, trailing her hand along a line of kites like a child might rake a stick along a picket fence.

"Really? I might hurt them? Do you make them so thin skinned?" Gloria laughed. She shook a cluster of clown faced bow kites. Their heads bobbed together.

"Oh, I *am* sorry. I suppose they'll have concussions now."

Herman tried to stop them clashing, but like a juggler with too many plates, his hands thickened and fell behind.

"Stop. They're dying. They're dying."

Gloria stopped at the bottom stair and reached under into a storage space. She pulled out a case of beer.

"Hermie. Don't you have any feelings? Why let them suffer? If they're dying, speed it up. Make them dead."

The first bottle she threw christened Lazarus and vomited on the Pieta. The warlord stood firm but the second glass wave shattered his resolve. Herman stood and watched while Rome fell and London burned. The dragon lay down with the swallow and the butterfly came to drink from their cuts. The Bismark hit a reef of broken glass and sank beneath an ocean of beery foam.

Herman's legs walked from under him. His torso slapped the floor. His eyes tried to wash away the sight of his world drowning.

"There. It's all over. I've laid your toys to rest. It's about time someone did." Gloria stood up on the bottom step and shook some glass slivers free from her shoe.

"Tomorrow you toe the line. I'll not have you fooling around with your mistress kites. If you make one more kite, I'm going to my lawyer."

She climbed the stairs and flicked off the lights.

Herman lay in the ruins. By the time morning light came in through the ground floor window he had stopped crying. Dry, he stood up. There was a lot of work to do.

GLORIA WOKE TO THE SMELL OF A BAKED CHEESE SOUFFLE. Her favorite breakfast. She thought she was dreaming and tried to fall back to sleep. The smell persisted and forced her to sit up. At the

foot of her bed lay a breakfast table warming the air with food. Black coffee, home fries, toast and marmalade circled the cheese souffle. Bacon sat on top. Propped up beside the coffee pot slumped a letter. Gloria read Herman's writing. "I'm sorry it had to be this way. I hope you don't mind."

The dear, Gloria thought. She'd been fully prepared to plead with Herman, try the "It was all my fault. Oh, how can you live with a beast like me" speech. That would have ruined her appetite. Now that Herman crawled back, she could afford to remain aloof.

The meal was satisfactory. The souffle seemed a bit off. It was difficult to tell after last night's drinking. No matter, warm food was all she craved.

"Herman, where are you?" Gloria called as she walked into the bathroom. They had separate rooms connected by a large bathroom. On his door was taped a letter.

"Please have a bath and relax. Take your time. There is no rush," she read.

The tub was full and steaming.

"Lord what have I created?" she said to the air. "He's turned his kite fetish to me. Well, it is an improvement," she admitted as she disrobed and slipped into the bath.

HERMAN LISTENED TO THE OVERSPILL FROM BEHIND HIS locked door. He looked at his watch as he walked around to lock Gloria's bathroom door. Lighting a cigarette, he sat down to wait. He watched an ash fall on Gloria's bed sheet. She never let him smoke in the house. He let another ash fall.

The first scream came seven minutes and twenty-eight seconds later. Coming at the end of a long burp, the way it did, he almost missed it. But no. It was a scream, short, sharp, and emphatic. The others that followed sounded very much like the first. He was correct, seven minutes and twenty-eight seconds. Kiting was an exact science. He always kept his records accurate. Duplication of perfection was the test of his profession, Herman thought.

Thirty-five minutes and five seconds later, Herman entered the bathroom. The room was redone in rose. She'd splashed vigorously near the end. Herman knew that ground glass was dangerous. Down at the kite club when the members fought with their Thai-Fighter kites, with the ground glass coated string, special security guards had to retrieve the cut string. Outsiders coming in contact with the string wouldn't know the danger. Herman knew.

He was happy she'd eaten all her breakfast.

Herman looked at her body. She never let him look before. Her tan covered every square inch. Those southern vacations were well spent. Herman nodded.

He eased the body back in the tub. There was a lot of work to do.

HANK DIDN'T WANT TO GO OUT ON A COLD WINDY AFTERNOON like today, but it was the only way he could think of to get an answer. It had been a week since he took Gloria out. He hadn't been able to get a hold of her. She hadn't phoned and no one answered his calls. Now there was Herman out there on the field in this hurricane struggling with one of his stupid kites.

Herman would know. "I'd better be careful. That bitch knows how to play both of us," Hank said under his breath.

"You never give up, do you, Herm?" Hank asked while he looked up at the kite buffeting in the wind.

"Never, Hank. Not when it comes to kites. They're my life," Herman said without taking his eyes off the kite.

"It's good for a man to have a hobby. This kite business is too strenuous for me. I go for indoor sports like bowling or dancing."

"Do you see how high the kite is riding? It's almost overhead. In a high wind like this a kite will do that, making it unstable." Hank looked at Herman. He didn't seem to be listening.

"That's real interesting, Herm. I was wondering . . ."

"The design's not the most imaginative. Just a simple two-celled box kite. I needed extra lift. The covering is heavy. Too heavy for a normal kite. The ratio between surface area and weight is way out of line. The box kite gives her the best chance to get up. You see I'm experimenting. You've got to break rules if you want to make new rules."

The kite plunged off to the left in a series of tight spirals. Herman ran with the wind, lessening the tension on the line. The kite righted itself and started to climb back up overhead.

Hank caught up and started back in. "About indoor sports, Herm, the missus and I met up with Gloria at Reddings a week ago. The missus wants us to get back together for dinner and dance, but she can't get anyone to answer your phone. This is the first time either of us has seen any of you two."

"Gloria doesn't bother about eating. Not any more."

"She's been sick?" Hank held the corners of his coat together.

"She's never been fitter. All her time is wrapped up in helping me with the kites." The kite held directly overhead.

"Yes. That's wonderful to hear. A man and wife need common interests to bring them close. I'm happy for you. But the missus was

rather insistent I get in touch with Gloria. I couldn't . . ."

"Look at that, will you? Right overhead."

Hank stopped for a second time and looked up.

"There are two ways to handle her. You can run with the wind or you can pull'er down quick. Straight overhead gravity will get the best of the wind. Before the kite's caught she'll be low and angled stable. I'll show you. You'll get a good view of her. She's one of a kind."

"Interesting, Herm. You make them personal. You get exactly what you want," Hank said, now willing to humor him until he got what he wanted.

"Yes, that's it. You're right."

Herman continued to pull the string from the sky. What once was an obscure blot against the sky quickly took the shape of a face, a lopsided Picasso face.

"Ugh. It's damn ugly, Herm. Why'd you make it so ugly?"

The face hung tethered forty feet distant, sliding back and forth against the unpredictable wind.

"You have no idea of the difficulties working with new materials. All the scraping, drying and shrinking. I hate to think. There are no guidelines. Believe me, this is the best anyone could do on a first try."

The kite was closer now, within twenty-five feet. The stitching showed up clearly on the tan covering, the veins were harder to see. Black hair streamed around the mouth.

A draft pushed the kite down.

"Hey, be careful with that thing," Hank sputtered as he sidestepped the diving kite.

Hank could see the peach-fuzzed skin, the ruptured veins and the sun freckles he kissed that night on the dance floor.

"At this height she's unpredictable, flighty, like she was in her other life. Always dancing from one man to another, from one passion to the next."

"No. Keep it away. Keep it away." Hank scratched at the air. He tried to run.

Herman let the kite sail with the wind, following Hank.

"She's with her final love, Hank. Why don't you give her one last dance before I send her up?"

Carbonado was busy nailing the green guys before they turned his humanoids into mutants. It was an awesome responsibility, but Sheriff Hatton was interested in a more down-to-earth problem of his own!

Showdown at the Rearing Horse Bar

by JERRY JACOBSON

SNOW FELL AGAINST THE WINDSHIELD OF THE COUNTY sedan the entire twenty miles from the county seat to Palouse. It fell in big, fat flakes that stuck to the glass like blobs of Elmer's Glue, and the defroster wasn't doing much of a job melting it, which meant the windshield wipers were being asked to be snow-plows. Hatton suspected the heater core was about to go. He had about a thirty-degree wedge of windshield to look through, and cold air was coming into the sedan from somewhere, but he couldn't put his finger on the leak. As winter mornings went in Benton County, this one belonged in a museum of 17th Century torture devices.

But Hatton had several things going for him to brighten his mood. Most importantly, he had his probable cause against Radley Carbonado in the form of a brief airplane ride in Clyde Cramer's

Cessna, the suspicious rancher who'd called Hatton in Benton to tell him it might be useful to him to "strap-in and fly around for a spell for a bird's eye view of things, 'specially the spread of this long-haired freaky kid, Radley Carbonado." Which they promptly did at a thousand feet to check his farm buildings and then to compare them with the buildings of a half dozen other farms in the valley to authenticate Hatton's probable cause. Which they did also.

And so Hatton had his probable cause. He also had eight months' worth of billing statements on Carbonado's farm from the Benton County Public Utility District No. 3, plus the present meter readings on Radley Carbonado's utility meters, which Hatton had recorded personally two hours earlier in the morning.

He had, as well, the handwritten note he'd found taped to the front door of Carbonado's house, which read: "*Gone into Palouse. Be back four p.m.*"—which meant Hatton would not have to go traipsing all over the county looking for his suspect, thanks to Carbonado's unwitting help.

And he had two other things: a search warrant from the county seat authorizing Hatton and such agents as he designated to conduct a thorough and complete search of the buildings, their contents and the environs of the property therein named; and a second warrant for Carbonado's arrest, which Hatton felt certain he could act upon after the orders of the first warrant were executed.

HE REACHED PALOUSE JUST BEFORE NOON. THE SNOW still fell intensely, like an explosion in a feather factory. Hatton's was the only car moving up Commercial Street and no people were to be seen. Even in the best of times, the business district of Palouse was never clogged with cars or pedestrians. It was a sleepy farming and logging town. Now, in the dead of winter, the farmers had all retreated from the harvest. And with the economic recession here just as deep as the snows, with home interest and mortgage rates still on their skyrocket climb to the moon, the Benton City Timber Company and its three satellite sawmills were shut down completely and a hundred workers and their families had moved away, leaving a dozen hills in the county standing tall and rich with timber no one could afford to chop down.

There was no having to hunt for Radley Carbonado's fifteen-year-old van. It was the only vehicle angle-parked in front of the Rearing Horse Bar, its sides billboarded with acrylic spray-paint graffiti whose time had come and gone: NIX ON NIXON! . . . THE URGE TO BUY TERRORIZES YOU! . . . FREE THE CHICAGO SEVEN!

... NUKE WASHINGTON! Across the avenue, the Lumberjack Tavern stood closed and boarded up. What had once been a wild and woolly, rednecked town was now deserted, down on its luck and markedly dead on its feet.

Hatton gingerly slid the county sedan in next to the van and got out. A blast of wind-driven snow hit him and he ducked his head against his chest and made a beeline for the sidewalk. He had no idea what Radley Carbonado looked like, but he was willing to bet he'd be the only aging hippie in the place.

Hatton pushed through the front door of the Rearing Horse and brushed the snow from his arms and shoulders. It was a massive barn of a place, with mooseheads on the walls and the air heavy with mustiness and age. Oil paintings were hung on the walls between the mooseheads, all of horses, many looking old enough to be Remington originals. Two oldtimers in plaid Mackinaw coats sat at the end of the bar drinking beer from bottles. The bartender, their generational equal with white hair and brief beard, lingered near them in the event of arbitration, polishing a long-necked schooner glass that could gain entry to any museum in the country just for the asking. In fact, the only things in the building that weren't at least a half-century old were the Defender video game and the young man in the ragged military field jacket who was furiously working its controls. His thin shoulders had the slight sag of a man who would never see thirty again, likely a survivor of Haight-Asbury and window panes of LSD smeared on squares of cellulose and peace rallies and communes and chantings from "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," a solitary soul who'd somehow missed the bus for the 70s and was now hopelessly trapped in a time-warp of the past with no one to give him rescue.

Hatton sidled up to Carbonado's left shoulder until he was in his field of vision. The young man's eyes batted briefly in recognition that the volume of space next to him had been invaded, but the fingers on the video game's control buttons never missed a beat.

"This is a beauty-game," said Radley Carbonado, working off nervous energy and speaking to no one in particular. "Top of the line in videos. How in hell a backwater ghost town like Palouse ever got one is a mystery, but it's a beauty-game. Pac-Man is passe now. Too predictable. And Space Invaders isn't hot anymore, either. But Defender doesn't have a pattern to it."

Carbonado's score had mounted to over 18-million points. Depending upon the skill of the player, it looked to Hatton as though a defender could play on the same quarter for days.

"You gotta protect your ten cities," Carbonado was explaining, as

his score crept up another million-mark. "You gotta nail those green guys before they pick up your humanoids and turn them into mutants. It's an awesome responsibility."

"When all your cities are safely inviolate," Hatton said. "I'd like to have a little talk with you. My name is Hatton. I'm the sheriff of Benton County."

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AN ATTACK OF ANXIETY OR MERELY the law of averages, but Radley Carbonado missed three missile shots in succession.

"Do I know you?"

"No, but I think *I* know *you*," Hatton said. "Unless I miss my guess, your name is Radley Carbonado and you've got a small spread about twenty miles north of town on Old Rustin Road."

"Yeh, man, well you know . . . you coulda got that sheriff's uniform at a costume shop and that badge with a quarter and a boxtop to Battle Creek, Michigan."

Hatton sighed, took out his wallet and presented his county identity card. Carbonado inspected it closely while his video machine went dead in his hands. "Well, this looks like the real article, all right. Just a little talk, did you say? Is this . . . er . . . *little talk* going to take very long?"

Hatton smiled thinly. "Oh no, Mr. Carbonado. I don't judge it will take very long at all. Can we move over to a table where we can relax and have a bit more privacy?"

Hatton was led to a table next to a silent juke box and beneath a painting of a cowboy maneuvering his horse to trap a young calf in a corner of a corral to be branded. Hatton saw the painting as mildly prophetic.

"Think I'll get me another schooner before we start our . . . *little talk*. Can I get you one, too, sheriff?"

"A sarsaparilla might go down nice," Hatton told Radley Carbonado.

"*Sarsaparilla*? Man, you're the first dude I ever knew to order *that* outside of an old Randolph Scott movie."

"Have the bartender dump it into a glass with a little ice," Hatton said without additional comment.

Carbonado was back in a minute. "One sarsaparilla for the lawman. With ice."

"Obliged."

Carbonado got comfortable across the table. "Well, sheriff," he said, the corners of his mouth turning upwards with mild amusement,

"what sort of approach will it be?"

"Approach?"

"You know. Your *modus operandi*. The accusative, brow-beating treatment? The rubber hose play? Or do you bring in a deputy and work the good cop-bad cop routine?"

"Ohhh, my *approach*. Well. I tend to favor the Socratic approach."

"Socrates. Yeh, I can dig it. The question-and-answer approach. Heavy inquisitor, Socrates."

"Time-consuming, but I've discovered it to be very effective. Ask a question: get the truth, a lie, a half-truth, a half-lie, or an evasion."

"Then you add up the suspect's score and see if he passed or failed," said Carbonado.

"Yep. That's pretty much how it's done."

Radley Carbonado leaned back and laced his hands behind his head over his long ponytail, a portrait of perfect composure. "Okay, sheriff, my answers are yours for the asking."

"Fine, Mr. Carbonado. Let's begin by determining when you took over the farm out on Old Rustin Road."

"About eight months ago."

"Did you move in alone?"

"You got it, sheriff. *A cappella*. After me and my old lady split up in Sausalito."

"Your wife, you mean."

"No, I mean my *old lady*. My squeeze, my main warmth, my roadmate."

"Oh. You mean your girlfriend."

Carbonado issued a pained smile. "Have it your way, sheriff. Yeh, breaking up with her was a maximum bummer. Like, we'd been through *everything* together. The marches, the rallies, the sit-ins, the riots, Woodstock, pelting Nixon with eggs. I come home one day and there's this note taped to the fridge saying she's moved out and is going to computer school. I shoulda figured something was about to get tossed into the fan. I mean, the signs were all there. She got a driver's license, bought a dress, started eating *meat*."

"So you took to the open road."

"The conditions for the revolution had really deteriorated out there. I mean, people at Berkley were actually going to *classes*, and Bob Dylan was going to *church*. I had to get back to the earth."

"How did you come to pick Palouse?"

"This is where the van broke down, man. I saw it as an omen, picked up that little piece of land for a song and painted my name on the mailbox."

Hatton took a sip of his sarsaparilla.

"How do you earn your living out there, Mr. Carbonado?"

"I got some chickens, a few pigs, a goat. Eggs, fryers, bacon and milk. I sell it to the R&D Grocery up the street a couple times a month. Then, too, I'll be planting a few veggies in the spring. Peas, beans, corn, squash. Truck garden stuff."

"I see." The painting above their table caught the corner of Hatton's eye again. The cornered calf knew it had run out of room. You could tell it in the eyes.

"Mr. Carbonado, tell me about the structures on your property."

"Structures?"

"Appurtenances, buildings."

"Buildings. Right. Well, there's the house. With a root cellar. And a work shed. And the chicken coops. Oh, and the garage. A separate building next to the house."

"Is that all?"

"That's it, sheriff."

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Hatton queried.

Radley Carbonado's eyes were working desperately to avoid Hatton's. They flitted from the moosehead, to the oil painting, to a spot beyond Hatton's right shoulder.

"The barn," Hatton said. "Isn't there a barn on your property, Mr. Carbonado?"

The eyes suddenly went as wide as bright balloons. "Geez, the *barn*. Yeh, man. Now, how could I forget to mention a thing like that?"

"A thing easily overlooked, I suppose," said Hatton, wryly. "You *do* have a barn, Mr. Carbonado?"

"Oh, sure. A *big* barn. A painted ad for chewing tobacco on the side and everything. Good barn, good barn."

"What do you use it for?"

"Well, not much at all, really."

"Do you keep beef cattle or milk cows in it?"

"Got no cows or cattle. Just some chickens, the pigs and the goat."

"Well, now we're *getting* somewhere," Sheriff Hatton said. "Mr. Carbonado, what *do you* keep in that barn with the tobacco advertisement on the side?"

Radley Carbonado put a forefinger to the tip of his nose; the better to order his barn inventory, Hatton thought.

"Well, let me see, now. I keep my spring seed stored in the barn. For next spring's planting, you know. And there's some horse stuff, bridles and stirrups. And some used tractor parts that were probably left behind by the previous owner."

"Anything else?" Hatton said.

"There's some old, leftover hay in the loft," Carbonado added.

"But no livestock, no animals penned up in there for the winter."

"You got the whole inventory, sheriff."

Hatton finished off his sarsaparilla and set it aside. Carbonado was fiddling nervously with a peace medallion hanging from his neck.

"Well now, Mr. Carbonado, it would seem we have met with some glaring inconsistencies here."

"Inconsistencies?"

"You see, this morning I took a trip out to your farm and took a reading on your electric meter, the one recording the power-use on your barn. That meter needle was spinning so fast, the revolutions nearly defied being counted by the human eye."

"Don't you have to serve a subpoena on a Utility District to do that?"

"Did that this morning, Mr. Carbonado. Duly served, recorded and filed with the Benton County Public Utility District No. 3."

"Well, I'll have to check with the American Civil Liberties Union on the legality of *that*."

"Of course, I *could have* searched your barn without serving the warrant to you in person. But I like the challenge in unraveling a good dilemma. And the note I found on your front door kept your whereabouts from being a mystery."

The foam atop Radley Carbonado's beer had reduced itself to a thin film, as it remained largely untouched.

"Eventually, Mr. Carbonado, I came around to asking myself the crucial question: what was going on inside that barn of yours that would cause such a dramatic jump in power consumption? Ah, I said to myself. Was it perhaps being used to stimulate the growth of a winter crop of some sort?"

Carbonado's eyes were doing a frantic fandango in their sockets. "I mean, don't you have to go through the Drug Enforcement Administration? I think there's a law somewhere that says you can't bypass all these agencies and jurisdictions like you're doing."

"Sorry, Mr. Carbonado. Out here in the county boondocks, I'm afraid *I am* the law and the jurisdiction. As long as I have probable cause and can roll a Benton County judge out of bed, I'm in business."

"Well, my lawyer and me will be looking into all of that. As well as any dudes I can find in the local chapter of the A.C.L.U."

"You see, Mr. Carbonado, my thinking ran this way. Maybe you were building a cash crop of Cannabis indica out there in that barn. I read where the Mexican and Columbian varieties have fallen out of

favor in the 80s. Afghanistanian strains, they're the high-grade item these days."

Radley Carbonado's jaw had dropped open wide enough to admit a Sherman tank.

"No, Mr. Carbonado, I'm not so backwards I don't read the *High Times* every now and again."

Carbonado managed a heartless sip of his watery beer.

"Now, what sort of heat source could you be using? Gro-Lux? Very adequate if you're raising a single marijuana plant in an apartment closet. But Gro-Lux lights went out with the 70s, especially if your inclinations run towards having a big, flourishing crop."

Carbonado's eyes were now relaxed and weary. The resignation in them was there to stay.

"No, if you've got designs on raising a few *hundred* potted marijuana plants in a huge, drafty barn, you'll use what forest products companies use to grow tree seedlings indoors. You'll use halide lights, with lots of heat and plenty of color rendition, maybe two dozen of them, with timers, heaters and fans. And maybe even PH meters and light meters to get an even growth. But, a dozen or so halides can really drain the power. And at 1,000 watts per lamp, with the whole works churning twenty-four hours a day, *that really is* a case of power to the people."

"You know about halides?"

"I know a little bit about a lot of things, Mr. Carbonado. Just enough to keep me out of trouble, but not so much that I become over-confident."

Hatton reached into an inside jacket pocket then, extracted the search warrant and slid it across the table to Radley Carbonado.

"The time, I'm afraid, has come."

"The search," said Carbonado. "I get the feeling there's a second shoe that's going to drop. I mean, after you open up those barn doors and find out what I got myself for Christmas."

"Sadly, yes," said Hatton. "After the search comes the arrest. Shall we go now, Mr. Carbonado?"

OUTSIDE THE REARING HORSE BAR, BOTH MEN TURNED up the collars of their coats against the fiercely driven snow. A new inch of it had built on the windshields of Carbonado's van and Hatton's county sedan.

"My connections are going to be plenty upset about the turn of events here, I can tell you that, sheriff."

"A failed business always brings with it its own special

repercussions," said Hatton. "We'll take my car. If you'll clear your half of the windshield, Mr. Carbonado, I'd be much obliged."

It was while they were plowing the snow from the windshield that Radley Carbonado asked for the bottom line to be filled in concerning his impending arrest. Above the whistle of the wind-driven snow, he yelled, "Sheriff, what was this business about you taking a ride in an airplane this morning! And what does any of that have to do with your probable cause!"

"We checked some of the buildings in the valley by air, Mr. Carbonado!" Hatton shouted back. "*Quite a number* of buildings, actually!"

"What were you looking for!"

"Something the roof of that barn of yours should have had in common with all the other farm structures we checked!"

"But didn't!"

"But didn't!" Hatton yelled back.

"Okay, so what didn't it have in common, sheriff!"

"Snow!" Hatton shouted. "The roof of your barn had no snow on it! The accumulated heat from those halide lamps of yours was melting the flakes the instant they hit it!"

"The *coup de grace*!" Radley Carbonado yelled back, with more admiration in his tone than malice.

"Nice turn of phrase, Mr. Carbonado!" Sheriff Hatton bellowed as the two men left off their plowing almost in unison and made beelines for the sedan's doors to get in out of the blizzard. ❊

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

Who was the man behind Badge 714?

"Dragnet."
Sergeant Joe Friday, played by Jack Webb on the TV series

What was the name of the motel where Marion Crane was stabbed to death in the shower?

The Bates Motel, run by Norman Bates in the movie Psycho.

He had his fingers in a number of pies, but the museum was his pride and joy. No one would take that from him!

The Wonderful Wax Museum

by MICHAEL CHRISTIE

MR. LEONARD BRYCE RAN A COMB THROUGH HIS LIGHT gray crewcut before giving himself a long, pleased appraisal in the bathroom mirror. The image beaming confidently back at him was of a fit, ruddy-faced, sixty-three-year-old man wearing a red smoking jacket with gold lame belt.

He was ready for them.

Everything was on the boil for his two greedy nephews and their wives who would soon be here for lunch. He knew they laughed at him behind his back, mocked his taste, said he was hopelessly out of date but that didn't bother him in the slightest. He clearly knew what he liked and didn't like, and not being one of the herd had a lot to do with how he'd made his pile. Wealth didn't accrue from conformity.

Mr. Bryce owned three apartment complexes, large blocks of shares in several international companies that paid high quarterly dividends, a carpet store, a chain of doughnut shops, and a wax museum. The wax museum acquisition was his precious baby, but his two plotting nephews and their conspiratorial wives thought it was a mongoloid deserving a quick death. He'd disagreed firmly with them a number of times about the wax museum and today was the final meeting about this "gross embarrassment."

He was aware of what they really wanted—they didn't embarrass that easily—and that was to have him declared bonkers so they could run his financial affairs. Now *that* bothered him. If they hired a good lawyer, a takeover could become a reality. In these days anything was possible in the law courts.

They'd become an irritating thorn in his side, and it was time to deal with them once and for all. He'd worked all morning in the basement office, and he was prepared. When it came to business they'd discover quickly that corny Uncle Len was no pushover. Corny indeed! What did *they* know?

MR. BRYCE GLANCED NERVOUSLY AT HIS SPIRO AGNEW wrist-watch. It was twelve o'clock noon, and the sharks would be arriving any minute now.

He hurried excitedly over to the living room window and peeked out through a corner of the zebra-patterned drapes. There they were, right on the dot. The four of them were marching up the front path, pointing in distaste at the giant concrete frogs and gnomes on the lawn and making loud, scornful comments. Morons! Mr. Bryce thought his outside decorations were nifty; especially the gnome urinating into the bird bath.

There went the door chimes, which played the first few bars of "Oh Dear, What Can The Matter Be?" He thought the door-chime gizmo was jake. They thought it was a pathetic joke.

Yes, time to teach them a lesson about the hard, cruel world of business—once and for all.

He gave them a breezy smile. "Come in, come in, nice to see you again," he lied.

What a god-awful quartet they were! Overweight, belligerent Al and his mousey wife, Jane; serious, conventional Raymond and his silly, effervescent wife, Barb.

"You're looking good, Uncle Len," said Raymond, smiling like the smarmy creep he was. "Still jogging your six miles?"

"Never miss a day."

"Don't know how you manage to do it and still have time to run your businesses. You should learn to take it easy. Don't overdo it. It's fine to be a health nut—pardon the expression—but a lot of men a lot younger than you have collapsed with heart attacks while jogging."

Fat Al blew out smoke from his perpetual cigar and chuckled nastily. "Good advice, Uncle Len. You know the old saying. One foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel." He was a fine one to talk.

No, they weren't too subtle. They'd be tickled pink if he had a fatal

coronary. That occurrence would make things so neat and simple. As the only surviving relatives they would inherit a fortune. The law would see to that even if he left them out of his will and bequeathed everything to a hospital for stray cats and dogs. Disputes of such wills were often successful.

Mr. Bryce could have said a lot about their sorry physical condition, particularly Al who looked like he was pregnant, but why bother? What was the use? "When you gotta go you gotta go," he said casually, dismissing the subject. "Well, don't just stand there marking time in the hot sun. Let's go into the kitchen where it's cooler. I've got Wieners boiling in the pot, and they should be ready."

The sour glances they exchanged didn't escape his notice.

"We don't want to put you to any trouble, Uncle Len," said Raymond quickly. "I can't stay long. I have to be back at the bank soon."

Al hacked his cigar-smoker's cough. "Yeah, the sooner we get down to our unpleasant business with you the better. I've got an appointment with a customer at the car lot in an hour."

Mr. Bryce registered disappointment. "But surely you've got time for a hot dog," he said in a hurt tone.

Barb broke the tense silence. "I'm starved," she said in her hyper way. "Breakfast was ages ago, and I like hot dogs."

Raymond sighed in defeat. "All right then. Let's have a hot dog."

THEY ENTERED THE KITCHEN. ABOVE THE DOOR FRAME was the fisherman's prayer worked out in fish-eyes on birch bark.

"I see that thing hasn't fallen down yet," said Al, but nobody was listening. Loud and giggly Barb had instantly become the centre of attention.

"Oh, look, look," she was exclaiming. "Look at the cushions. I've never seen these before!" On each of the kitchen chairs was a nylon cushion bearing an inscription: She read them in her high, dizzy voice. " 'For You I Pine,' 'For You I Douglas Fir', 'Fruitvale, 1971.' " She howled with laughter. Let her have her fun now. Mr. Bryce knew the silly girl wouldn't be laughing much longer. "Oh, this is too much. Wait! Don't sit down, Ray. What does your cushion say?"

His answer was sullen. " 'Farmers Are Fun People.' "

Mr. Bryce cheerfully studied him in his discomfort. A goateed assistant branch bank manager of intractable conservatism. The reluctant answer coming from this officious man in a pin stripe suit was amusing.

"I like collecting things," said Mr. Bryce. Among his treasures was a

chamber pot that played in music-box fashion "How Dry I Am" when somebody sat on it, and a toe-nail clipper in the shape of a guillotine. "I've got lots of swell things."

"I didn't think people said 'swell' any more," plain Jane wondered out loud in her contrived ignorance. She had her own special way of annoying.

"I guess I'm not hip," said Mr. Bryce with a sad sigh. "Maybe I should have said cool or mint or ace on base or—"

"Yes, yes," Raymond interrupted impatiently. "I don't want to be rude, but our time is limited. We're here for an important meeting. One that I'm sure you can appreciate is very difficult for us."

"Yeah, let's get on with it," growled Al. He was a restless, shifty-eyed individual, noted Mr. Bryce, who was never at ease unless he was conning some hapless customer on the car lot. Just to keep his nervous fingers busy, he picked up one of the souvenir glasses and silently read the message on the rim: Nanaimo: Bathtub Capital Of The World. He scowled.

"Whoops," exclaimed Mr. Bryce. "I forgot to fill your glasses, and I appreciate you have little time. This should refresh all of you on such a hot, humid day."

From a pitcher on the table he filled their glasses.

"What sort of stuff is this?" said Al, frowning at the red liquid in his glass.

"Raspberry juice," said Mr. Bryce. "Try it. It's full of good, healthy vitamins."

Again the four made sour faces at each other across the table. Obviously hot dogs and raspberry juice was not their idea of an exciting lunch.

"I can see why you've made a lot of money, Uncle Len," said Al with a crude wink. He chugalugged the drink and belched. "This is not what you'd call an expensive spread. No wonder you've got megabucks."

Vacuous Jane smiled in agreement. In her soulless uniformity she went along with everything her boorish husband said.

"Bachelors tend to do things quick and simply," said Mr. Bryce. He put a warm bun on each of the paper plates in front of them and a platter of steaming wieners in the centre. "You'd be astonished at the amount of protein in a wiener, and you get your necessary roughage from the bun."

"Sounds disgusting when it's put so clinically," said Barb.

Mr. Bryce ignored her. "Help yourselves. Mustard and relish coming up."

Raymond sipped his raspberry juice moodily. "Uncle Len," he said wearily, the way he might have turned down a loan applicant, "there's no sense beating about the bush. Your latest project is outright loony, and it's embarrassing for a man in my position to constantly be an apologist for it."

Mr. Bryce's eyebrows rose in surprise. "But the wax museum is a gold mine! It's making money hand over fist. There were lineups to get in after it was featured on the six o'clock news on TV. We've had this discussion several times, and each time I'm astonished that you in the banking business can't go along with a profitable venture."

"Raymond's right," said Al, helping himself to another glass of raspberry juice. "There's no reason for you to continue with it. You have money coming out of your ears. Your wax museum is just weird. It's a gross embarrassment to us all as we've said a number of times."

THE LARGE, RED-BRICK BUILDING WAS ACROSS FROM THE Albion ferry dock in the small district of Haney, British Columbia. The brightly lit theatre marquee in front was a grabber, concluded Mr. Bryce, even though it had "swell" up there. Unashamedly it shouted in child-like enthusiasm:

THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE'S WONDERFUL WAX MUSEUM

A Swell Time For All!

Free Balloons For The Kiddies!!!

It was in an ideal location. People in a long lineup of cars, waiting for the ferry to take them across the Fraser River on the five-minute trip to Fort Langley, would often park and come in, sometimes out of boredom, but usually to see what had amused and outraged their friends and neighbors.

Formerly The Canadian Wax Museum, its surprisingly long life had always been a heart beat away from bankruptcy. It finally caved in. Admirable though its aspirations were, not many were eager to pay admission to see the staid tableaux of Emily Carr at her artist's easel, Captain James Cook studying his maps, the deaths of Wolfe and Montcalm after the bloody battle on the plains of Abraham, or of John Cabot reaching Cape Breton Island after his grueling fifty-two day voyage.

It was given a great deal of sanctimonious lip service on its demise, but when all was said and done it was just ho-hum. What it needed was pizzazz, so when Mr. Bryce bought the place for a bargain he began to make immediate changes with the help of various college art students

who were willing to work for minimum wages in exchange for that vague concept known as "experience." Hunky dory! The two middle-aged women who'd been employed there for years were appalled at these changes, and so they quit on the spot in thorough disgust. Women could be so troublesome, and that was why he had never married. One of them went so far as to tell Mr. Bryce that he was creating a dog's breakfast. They had their artistic pride and there was no way in the world that they could go along with such ridiculous cost-cutting.

Well, that was tough beans. He was a successful businessman because he could intuit what the public wanted.

It was Mr. Bryce's strict policy always to keep production and maintenance costs to a minimum. So right from the first day ordinary wigs were used on the wax heads rather than the "hairpieces" made by the patient strand-by-strand implantation by needle of human hair done so lovingly—and unprofitably—by the two middle-aged women. That process took far too much time, and time was money. Was it that crucial if plastic fingernails were seldom "manicured" or glass eyeballs sometimes dusty?

Mr. Bryce ran the museum as cheaply as possible. As a result an intentional mockery (it had to be!) was made of the high-tech "audio-animatronics" of Disney World where a superb, life-like Abraham Lincoln, naturalistically shuffling from foot to foot to emphasize his thoughts, addressed his presidential colleagues. At the C.P.W.W.M. only a few figures moved and they operated by simple hydraulics. *Very* simple. There was nothing superb about them. Some had a battery-operated cassette inserted below the neck—the deluxe models—and periodically from this area would come a few metallic words.

Now instead of some bored young girl who needed a few bucks, an Alfred Hitchcock caricature greeted visitors at the entrance with a three-motion, wobbly bow and said: "Good eve-ning. Please follow the arrows to the right, put out your cigarettes, and may God in his love and wisdom be with you." It didn't sound much like the master of suspense. The recording made by one of the many students passing through was a Humphrey Bogart fan and was used to imitating him. Charitably, it could be said it was a combo impression of Bogie doing Hitchcock. Badly! Above the portly Hitchcock simulacrum was a misspelled sign: NO SMOKEING PLEAS.

People loved hoke because it made them feel superior, and Mr. Bryce satisfied them.

There was not the slightest comparison to other North American wax museums with their sophisticated computers and video discs.

The first scene was a darkened, old-fashioned bed chamber where

Dracula (unmistakably Bela Lugosi because of the hairline) with bloody fangs was bending over the peaceful form of Sleeping Beauty (Mae West, going by the wig) whose chest rose and fell erratically. From the run-down cassette battery in the count's neck there issued a deep, slurred: "I want to drink your blood." In a corner was a rigid, white-haired Hopalong Cassidy (likely William Boyd) in the act of inserting a silver bullet into his gun.

On the floor in front of the scene was an engraved warning on a plaque: *Through envy of the devil came death into the world. Solomon 2:24.*

AL HAD ANOTHER CIGAR IN HIS MOUTH AND WAS fumbling for matches.

"Here, use this," said Mr. Bryce, and handed him a table lighter. The lighter was in the shape of a jumbo jet. The unpleasant Al scowled again before he lit his cigar from the flaming wing tip.

"I've been through your wax museum quite a few times trying to figure it out and it doesn't have any theme or continuity as far as I can see," said Al. "It makes no sense." He took a handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped his forehead. "For instance, that scene with the broad in the swing. What in hell is that supposed to be about?"

Mr. Bryce smiled faintly. "I thought that was obvious, Al," he said loftily.

"Obvious!" Al snorted. "Who to?"

"Well, maybe it is esoteric," conceded Mr. Bryce, trying to keep his temper, "but that's only at first. You know, you're in too much of a rush. A person has to take time before he can understand."

"Understand *what*? It's completely screwy."

"That's what people said about the inventor of the Pet Rock. They don't say that any more."

"Yeah, but that was an obvious put-on, and people thought it was a harmless and fun thing. Your wax museum is different. People don't know what to think."

"I think it's cute," piped up Barb, and stopped from gushing further when her husband, Raymond, gave her a dirty look. "Well, sort of cute."

"I agree with Al," said Raymond, loosening his tie. "I don't think *I'm* a dummy, but I have to admit that girl in the swing scene doesn't make sense to me either. There's nothing esoteric about it. I have to be frank and say it's idiotic."

Jane, who always went along with the loudest, said, "True, true, *I* think it sucks." Clueless!

Al wiped the back of his oversized neck. "That scene should be dismantled," he huffed. He was getting quite worked up about the matter.

It was a diorama featuring the hunchback of Notre Dame, who resembled Lester Pearson. That famous head had been kept. The former Canadian prime minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner's right eye was partially closed and had a purple bruise, and his tongue, which was a piece of calf's liver, lay limp at the side of his mouth. All this gave him a twisted leer as he looked up the skirt of Pippi Longstocking, rocking back and forth on a swing. Her face was a distinct similarity to the comedian, Joan Davis. Sherlock Holmes in deer-stalker hat and fly open was the goggle-eyed image of Eddy Cantor rather than Basil Rathbone and was positioned in front of the swing to get a close up view through his magnifying glass. A bald man—the stolen wig was not yet replaced—in a dark blue suit with a violin under his arm stood disapprovingly by a plastic fir tree. "Now cut that out," he yelled every so often. Jack Benny?

The observation on the engraved plaque was: *Have they not divided the prey: to every man a damsel or two? Judges, 5:30.*

It was Raymond's turn. He spoke listlessly. "It's sure warm in here. Can't you do something about it, Uncle Len? Isn't there a fan?"

"That's why I have the curtains closed," said Mr. Bryce. "Lowers the pressure. The windows are also open."

"You wouldn't know it. Anyway, that hunchback scene is not the only one I don't understand. There's also the one with the bird."

"A parrot," Mr. Bryce elaborated.

The scene was of Frankenstein's monster (likely John Diefenbaker, another dead prime minister) swiping aimlessly at the fruit on the head of Carmen Miranda, the bombshell from Brazil, who was gleaming in her wide-eyed way at a calculating Long John Silver (Robert Newton) with his slipping eyepatch. Periodically the parrot on his shoulder squawked: "Watch out behind ya, cutie!"

The sermon on the plaque was: *And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard: thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger. Leviticus, 19:10.*

THE DISCUSSION SEEMED TO BORE THE TWO WOMEN BECAUSE they were nodding their heads sleepily.

"We're not the only ones to think the museum is an atrocity," said Al. His eyelids were drooping. "I'm sure you must have read the comments in the guest book. There are hundreds of them."

At the top of every page in the guest book in capital letters was the

caution: *JUDGE NOT THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED. ST. MATTHEW, 7:1.* However, that admonition seemed to release the latent critic in the visitors. Some were eloquent:

“Repulsively fascinating!”

“Disgustingly attractive!”

“Punk iconoclasm at its most dismal!”

“Tacky!”

“Disjointed in more ways than one!”

“Luxuriant insanities!”

“Blasphemous!”

“How dumb can you get!”

“Interesting!”

“Not everyone has been negative,” said Mr. Bryce, recalling that solitary “interesting,” which he’d written himself. “One man’s meat is another man’s poison.” He smiled at that.

“I don’t think you’re being realistic, Uncle Len,” said Raymond, slurring his words like a drunk. “Anyway, we’ve spent almost all our time talking about the wax museum and that’s not what we came for. We’re here to—to—give you clear notice that we’ve decided to contact a lawyer about the pro—process of having you committed. We think you’re mad and not—not—capable of handling your affairs any longer. Al and I—will—will—be the ad—administrators of your—your—”

Al was not going to administrate anything, because he was asleep and Raymond was no longer able to keep his eyes open. His head fell forward on his chest. All four were now in a doze. A doze from which they would never awaken.

Soon they would be staring sightlessly at the pitcher of raspberry juice loaded with ground-up Seconal and Veronal pills. Enough to kill a blueback whale. One had to be ruthless in business.

MR. BRYCE CHUCKLED ON HIS WAY TO THE LARGE BASEMENT office and noted when he got there that the wax was boiling at the correct temperature of 87° centigrade in the four old bath tubs. The ancient embalming process originated by the Egyptians was so simple and effective, he marvelled.

A man less fit—a health nut, eh!—would have trouble with Al, a human Toby jug who required lots of tape, but Mr. Bryce didn’t mind. He hummed to himself as he went about his grisly work. The job for the group was a long and tedious one, and then there were the trips back and forth in the dawn hours from his house to the museum. Luckily, the Excalibur Al sold him had a roomy trunk.

Finally, Mr. Bryce had a chance to relax and sit back to view the newest scene. Who said there was no continuity in this madman's museum? Visitors would see Cleopatra (Joan Crawford) in her bath where she was attended by Florence Nightingale (Grace Kelly) and Tugboat Annie (Marie Dressler). Then they would come across the family of dummies—mummies—in the four sarcophaguses. Those fancy coffins had cost an arm and a leg—ha! ha! They'd really made him pay through the nose—ouch! Well, he was forced to foot (!) the bill only just having the stomach (!!) for it.

In celebration Mr. Bryce drank Cliquot champagne from a mug with "Cawfee Time" on it as he admired the engraved plaque. It would puzzle the visitors, but it made perfect sense to him. On this subject he was totally hip (!!!).

It said: *Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Peter (!!!!) 5:8.*

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

What do Adam West, Stacy Harris, Garry Merrill, Matt Crowley, and Robert Lowery have in common?

They all played the character Batman on TV, on radio, and in the movies.

The Beretta .25 was an automatic pistol favored by what well-known agent?

Ian Fleming's super secret agent James Bond, of course.

AU1 was the license plate number of a Rolls Royce Phantom 337 owned by what villain?

Auric Goldfinger, played by Gert Frobe in the 1964 movie Goldfinger.

It was a lovely machine, with a ring of colorful horses prancing under a sequinned canopy. It had been used to give pleasure, but now its purpose was sinister and deadly!

The Carousel

by JEAN DARLING

THE TRUCK TOILED UPHILL, TURNED INTO THE GRAVEL drive and slowed to a stop as lightning flashed the old building into bright relief against low hanging clouds. A man jumped down from the cab and, pulling his cap low, ran through the rain for the shelter of the arched doorway.

"Jesus, what a night," he muttered, pulling the bell.

When there was no answer, he stepped back to look up at the windows. They were dark. Once again he tugged the bellpull. He beat a tattoo on the brass lion-head knocker. He shouted and was still shouting when bolts were drawn back and the door creaked open to reveal an angular tweed-clad woman somewhere in her fifties.

"Yes?" she asked, one hand on the door, the other gripping the collar of an Irish Wolfhound the size of a small pony.

"Sorry it's so late, but the storm held me up. This is Castle Killbawn, I hope." The woman nodded, wondering who this wet young man with a South African accent could be and what it was he wanted. "Will you tell Mr. John Winthroppe that Malcolm Carver would like to see both him and his wife?" The woman looked at him without answering. "Please, the name is Malcolm Carver and I've come a long way." The

dog growled.

"Mr. Winthrope is deceased and Mrs. Winthrope never sees anyone. Goodnight." As the door began to close, Carver wedged himself into the narrowing gap. The dog growled again, this time showing a set of sharp teeth.

"I hope you've a good grip on that collar."

"Not for long if you don't get yourself out of the doorway."

"Don't be afraid, I'm not here to harm you—I'm Mrs. Winthrope's nephew, her brother, James Carver's son. I'm sure she'll want to see me."

"James? The one in South Africa at the asbestos mines?" Malcolm nodded. "Oh, please forgive me. Elizabeth will be delighted. You see we have so few visitors, especially on stormy February nights." While speaking she bolted the door and lead the way to the library where a coal fire smoldered on the hearth. "Please wait here, I'll go tell Elizabeth you're here—she'll be so surprised. Come, Melda." Giving a parting growl, the dog trotted after her.

WHILE WAITING, CARVER MOVED AROUND THE BOOK lined walls whistling softly under this breath whenever a chosen volume proved to be a first edition. Every now and again he executed a little dance step, then glanced over his shoulder to see if he had been observed. At last, footsteps in the hall sent him scurrying over to the fireplace where he leaned, one elbow on the mantel, warming himself as Elizabeth Winthrope was rolled into the room in an ornate wooden wheelchair.

"Malcolm! Is it really you?" she cried, arms outstretched.

"Aunt Elizabeth!" Two strides carried the man over to the chair where he clasped her two hands in his.

"Why you're all grown up!" Mrs. Winthrope exclaimed. "Turn around and let me see you." The slim, tousled young man laughed and obeyed.

"There. From the back—left side—right side, all five foot ten inches of brown-haired, blue-eyed, thirty-three year old nephew who is not too old to give his Aunt Elizabeth a kiss!" Laura and the wolfhound watched from the sidelines, the woman unsmiling, the dog growling.

"Melda! you should be ashamed growling at Malcolm. And you, boy, why do you call me Aunt Elizabeth, I'm your Aunty Beth and I always will be." The dog growled again. "Melda, come here to me now." She snapped her fingers. "Sit!—good girl—and you Laura, you aren't much better standing there with a face on you like the angel of death."

"Elizabeth, what an awful thing to say!"

"Oh Laura, you are a stick-in-the-mud. Malcolm, this is my oldest and dearest friend, Laura MacDonald. We grew up together and when her Geoffery died two years ago in 1951 I persuaded her to come over and keep me company."

"Pleasure, Mrs. MacDonald." Malcolm inclined his head slightly.

"Laura, please call me Laura," the woman smiled. "It was kind of Elizabeth to invite me but it wouldn't have been much of a life otherwise with her here in County Clare and me rattling around alone in London."

"And it's not so bad the two of us when we have Mary Kelly to cook for us and her husband, Paddy, to keep the place from falling away altogether."

"Yes. I don't know about you but I fancy some tea and sandwiches would go down a treat now. And while I'm about it, I'll have Mary air the bed in the gold room for Malcolm." Laura's voice dwindled away toward the kitchen.

"Not the gold room anymore, Malcolm's room," Elizabeth Winthrop called after her, looking for all the world like a plump little white hen perched in the big-wheeled chair, a crocheted shawl tucked around her knees.

AND SO THE GOLD ROOM BECAME MALCOLM'S ROOM AS did everything else as the days passed—or so it seemed to Laura MacDonald. Having fetched and carried for her friend and been privy to her every thought for over two years, the woman now felt shut out, unwanted as Malcolm danced attendance on his Auntie Beth. And despite her warnings that there was danger from possible falling stones, the young man wheeled his aunt to the disused part of the Thirteenth Century Castle where the roof was open to the heavens and the battlements stood high and snaggle-toothed against a sky more often grey than blue. And everywhere they went they seemed to whisper together like conspirators.

Malcolm told Elizabeth about South Africa. He told about his father's dying and his mother's remarriage to a wine farmer in Stellenbosch. He told about the strange illness that had kept him out of the war. He told her about the ship boarded in Cape Town that had carried him past Australia, New Zealand and through the Panama Canal before finally setting him ashore at Southampton. And every so often she would ask what he kept locked in the back of the truck parked outside the West Wing, the only part of the Castle Killbawn that was still habitable.

"It's a surprise," Malcolm would tease, promising to show it to her on the first sunny day, and they would laugh together as Melda eyed them with suspicion from a distance.

ONE DAY WHEN THE WIND HAD GONE SOMEWHERE ELSE to blow, he pushed Elizabeth along the rugged cliff path whose edge fell sheer to the sea more than a hundred feet below. "Laura will have a fit if she looks up and sees us here; she's dead against anyone coming along here now. But it's so beautiful. The last parish before reaching the New World." Malcolm put the brake on the wheels and hunkered down beside the chair. "If you squint a little it's so clear today, I'll bet you could see New York. My husband, John, used to say that. He and Melda spent a lot of time up here looking at the sea those last months. Look, there—a ship gliding along the horizon."

"Well, I'm glad Melda didn't come along today." Malcolm rose and moved the chair closer to the edge of the path. "How do you keep from going crazy in this God forsaken place?" The air was brittle despite the sun.

"Isolated maybe, but not God forsaken. And it has its uses. During the blitz we sent over all the valuables from the house in Sloan Square. And we used to spend lovely Christmases here; the family would come from all over the world." Elizabeth sat snug, wrapped in sheepskin with a blue woollen scarf tied under her chin. "Then, when John fell ill just after the war, we moved over for good."

"Has the castle been in the family for long?"

"Not really, as castles go. Your great-grandfather bought it. He'd been having an affair with a Lady of the Court and, as legend has it, he crossed the Irish Sea one jump ahead of the King's men. It was he who built the West Wing in which we live. The castle was falling to ruins even then. Malcolm, I wish you'd move me back a bit from the edge. It was somewhere along here that a friend of the family missed his footing. His body was found on that ridge of rock that juts out of the water."

"It certainly would be an easy thing to do with all these loose stones on the path." While speaking, Malcolm kicked some pebbles over the edge and watched them fall down the cliffside. "It should have a guardrail."

"Please, Malcolm—not so close; it makes me nervous." The man grinned at her over his shoulder; then he shrugged and moved back to squat down beside her chair.

"There was one once—and a little sheltered platform. Oh dear, the sun's getting low, I think it's time we started for home and, not only

that, I think it's time you told me what you have locked away in your lorry."

AND SO, AS HE EASED THE CHAIR DOWN THE SLOPING path Malcolm told her that the secret object was nothing more sinister than a carousel. "A carousel, Auntie Beth, all in bits and pieces tucked away under lock and key." Then he told her how, a few weeks after landing back in England, he had seen an ad in a newspaper. "Lad by the name of Bill Holloway had this round-about and he wanted a partner. I telephoned the number given and went up to London to talk to him. I liked the idea of gypsying around the country from one fair to another, so we teamed up. It took every penny I had, but it's a fine rig. Has its own generator, everything, even camping equipment. Things went great for a while, then Bill died of a burst appendix and, as our contract stated that if either of us died the remaining partner would own everything lock, stock and barrel, I became the proud possessor of a small carousel."

By now they were cutting across the garden towards the side entrance where Paddy was unloading the old Bentley from its weekly shopping trip to the village. "As soon as it's a bit warmer and the sun decides to stay out long enough to dry the grass, I'll show it to you—that is if you don't get tired of me and show me the door," he added, glancing down at her with narrowed eyes.

"Never, my dear, never ever. You know someday this will all be yours—James was my nearest relative and heir with you next in line if—" Sudden tears spilled down her cheeks.

"Auntie Beth, please don't cry." Malcolm leaned down and kissed her cheek.

"You said it was his heart. I wonder if it's hereditary—it's my heart keeps me in this chair. I'm so afraid of having another attack—"

"Shhh Auntie Beth, you mustn't think of things like that, not when Laura is calling us in for tea," Malcolm said, changing the subject.

"I SEE YOU MANAGED TO PUT YOURSELF TO BED, OR DID Malcolm help you when he brought in your sleeping draft?" Laura moved around Elizabeth's bedroom straightening a picture here, a book there.

"It was only warm milk; I've been able to fall asleep without medication lately." Elizabeth sat up in bed with a fluffy pink shawl around her shoulders.

"Almost five weeks now and he's made no mention of leaving." The woman stood near the door. There were so many things she felt needed

to be said, but what good would it do when her friend was besotted with her nephew. "Well—I suppose I might as well turn out the light," Laura said at last, still making no move to go.

"Please, Laura, don't run away. Sit on the bed beside me." She patted the counterpane. "I'd like to talk about Malcolm. You've been so—well, cool to him lately."

"I try not to be, but there's something that doesn't ring true somehow. Like his not remembering summers spent at Torquay or the time he fell off his bicycle and broke his leg. Like not recognizing the portrait of his grandfather. After all, the portrait hung in James' house until he took his family to South Africa."

"It was some illness. He explained all about how it made him lose his memory. James wrote at the time they almost lost him."

"I know all that." Now the dam had burst, she went on. "What about today—taking you up on the cliff path? What if he had lost hold of the chair—"

"He's young, thoughtless perhaps, but he was in just as much danger—"

"Malcolm Carver isn't a wealthy old woman tied to a wheelchair!"

"Laura! You're not to say such terrible things if you wish to remain my friend. I think you are being most unfair."

But Laura wasn't listening. "I suppose you told him you are able to walk—if it wasn't for the strain. God, Elizabeth I don't know how you can be so gullible—"

"Laura, that is enough! Malcolm is almost like a son to me and believe me, my dear, blood *is* thicker than water."

Stunned by this last reprimand Laura crossed to the door where she stood fighting back the tears. "I don't trust his eyes—the way they hide his thoughts—the way he's taken over so there's nothing for me to do anymore," she cried, turning to face the woman in the bed. "*He* takes you for walks. *He* brings you hot milk. *He* reads to you—everything. All that's left for me to do is to turn out the light and say goodnight."

"Oh, I didn't realize." Elizabeth got up and moved haltingly over to where her friend stood weeping. "I'm so sorry, I don't ever want you to feel shut out. You are my best friend and I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You shouldn't have got up just because I'm behaving like a jealous school girl," Laura said, wishing she had been adult enough to hold her tongue. All the outburst had achieved was to alienate the woman she wished to protect.

TRUE TO HIS WORD, ON THE FIRST WARM, DRY DAY IN

April Malcolm piled Elizabeth and Laura in the Bentley and took them to see the carousel. It had been set up in a glen near the abandoned Gypsy camp about five miles inland from the castle and for the past week he had spent every morning painting, polishing and generally getting the ride ready for the coming season.

"The carousel!" Elizabeth exclaimed on seeing the ring of colorful horses prancing beneath a sequin encrusted canopy; on one side the generator stood, on the other there was a small clown-bedecked calliope.

"It looks just like a fairy thing down there in the valley!" Laura cried.

"We wondered where you had got to—missing breakfast like that and Mary wouldn't say a word about what you were up to."

"Of course not. Both she and Paddy were sworn to secrecy, else how could I surprise my Auntie Beth?" Laura's pleasure faded at the slight. "Now you stay here comfy in the car while I run over and get the generator going."

"Oh Laura, it's so lovely, the ostrich plumes on the horses' heads, and the way the sun sparkles on those little things on the top. Oh, I do hope he'll give us a ride—do you think he will?" Elizabeth chattered like a child seeing her first country fair and when the calliope struck up "Enter The Gladiators" and the horses began to move, it was all she could do to keep from dancing where she sat.

"You'd better simmer down; you know what the doctor told you about any undue excitement," Laura remonstrated. Then the merry-go-round slowed to a stop and Malcolm was back gathering Elizabeth Winthrope in his arms. "Her heart's not strong enough for this kind of lark," her friend insisted.

"You're such a spoilsport, Laura. If Auntie Beth is enjoying herself, it will do her a world of good—her life is far too dull. So to brighten it up a bit I'm going to let both of you ride until you get tired of going round and round. Which horse do you want, Auntie Beth?" Malcolm asked, stopping beside the carousel.

And so the afternoon spun itself away in carefree pleasure until it was time to start for home. The next morning at breakfast Malcolm Carver announced that he would have to leave on the coming Saturday after the evening meal if he were going to be on time for the first fair of the season.

"But I'll be back in October," he promised.

IN HONOR OF THE DEPARTING GUEST CROWN DERBY
china, crystal and silver graced a table headed by Elizabeth Winthrope

wearing a grey silk dress with a small lace collar. Malcolm and Mary faced Laura and Paddy through the floral centerpiece but nobody spoke. There didn't seem to be much to say. Elizabeth was racking her brain trying to think of ways to keep the young man from leaving. Laura couldn't wait to see the back of him. Mary and Paddy didn't care much one way or the other and Melda, sprawled in the doorway, begrudged each and every morsel of delicious smelling roast chicken being forked into the five mouths.

When at last the table was cleared and Mary was back with the whipped cream and sherry trifle, Malcolm produced a bottle of wine. "Claret, nice and light," he said rising. "I think a little toast is in order." He moved around the table filling glasses. "That's yours, Mary—and Paddy. Sorry it's not poteen." Paddy laughed. "Laura, and as you are teetotal, Auntie Beth, I'll put in a drop of water first, then top it up with a bit—there you have a pretty pink drink. Me, I'll just stick to straight water. It wouldn't do for me to set out for Dublin and the ferry under the affluence of incohol." He sat down and raised his glass in a toast. "Oh, I almost forgot Melda." Carver took something from his pocket, unwrapped it and tossed it to the dog who caught the tidbit in her mouth. "I know sweets aren't good for her but this once won't hurt," he laughed and then he was on his feet saying goodbye.

"But you can't go without your trifle, Malcolm love, it's Laura's party piece," Elizabeth cried, spooning the dessert into cut crystal bowls.

"I'll get too fat! Not only that, sooner gone, quicker home," the young man said, backing out through the open French windows. "Bye now and God Bless," he called just before he moved out of sight. A few moments later the truck rumbled off into the night.

WHEN CARVER RETURNED TO THE CASTLE DINING ROOM ten minutes later, quite a different scene met his eyes. The smiling, waving foursome were now slumped forward onto the table as though overcome by a sudden uncontrollable desire for sleep. Even Melda sprawled on the floor dead to the world, courtesy of the same sleeping potion that had spiked the wine.

Having switched on the light, he crossed to the head of the table, where he eased Elizabeth into an upright position against the high back of her wheelchair. "Just like the Mad Hatter's tea party," he said as he trundled her out to where the truck stood idling in the driveway. "Come on, upsy daisy," he said, lifting her into the cab.

At the brow of the hill he stopped. It wasn't too late to turn back, to

replace his passenger at the table. Oh, there might be a flap when they woke up but that would pass, he thought, looking at the white head leaning on his shoulder. Unfortunately, Elizabeth chose this exact moment to open her eyes and the die was cast. Malcolm eased the truck down the rutted, unpaved road to where the carousel sat gleaming in the pale light of the moon.

"Malcolm? Is it you, Malcolm?" Elizabeth slurred, shaking her head to clear the fog. She looked down to see what he was doing and saw that her arm had been wrapped in a chamois and Malcolm was pulling a sheepskin glove over the lot.

"Can't have you marked," he explained, tucking the chamois into the top and closing the snap-fastening. "Now, we'll just get these woolly socks on over your shoes and we'll be ready to take a little walk."

"You know it's bad for me to walk. Please, Malcolm, I could get another heart att—"

"I'm not Malcolm. Come on now, swing your legs around and I'll help you slide to the ground," he said, his native Cockney no longer softened by a South African inflection.

"What do you mean you're not Malcolm?" She allowed herself to be eased out of the cab.

"Come on now—walk. I'll help you so's you don't fall." Ignoring the question, he took her by the arm and headed for the carousel. When they stopped she stood blinking at it in disbelief.

"But Malcolm, you told us it was all packed away." She turned toward him as the man removed his belt.

"No! No!" she cried, and with the socks twisting on her feet she tried to run away. Two easy strides brought the man to her side.

"Don't make it harder on yourself." He spoke while pulling the belt through the buckle until it was snug around her glove-covered wrist. "Now back to the round-about like a good girl." He urged her along with his hand. "I'll just fasten it here—" As he spoke he secured the other end of the belt to a hand-grip set into the circular platform and went over the generator.

"Get ready to move when I switch on." Several clanks sounded loud in the narrow valley; then the carousel lurched and began gently to revolve, pulling Elizabeth along at arm's length.

"Please don't do this to me, Malcolm."

"I told you I am not Malcolm Carver. He's dead. My name's Bill Holloway. I'm the bloke owned the round-about."

"If Malcolm's dead, you murdered him," the words came in little out-of-breath bursts.

"I told you the truth about how my partner died. It was appendix—natural like. I'm no murderer." It was true; he had not laid a finger on Carver; neither had he taken him to a hospital rationalizing that, had the man been stricken while alone he would have been physically incapable of driving the truck. "I'm no murderer," he repeated, looking at the slowly circling horses whose feathered and jewelled headdresses glimmered in the pale moonlight. Tears filled his eyes at the injustice of the accusation. "He was my friend—I couldn't kill my friend any more than I could kill you." Holloway switched off the generator and ran to catch Elizabeth as she slumped to the ground.

"Thank you," was more breath than sound against his face as he lifted her up into the cab.

"I wish things were different. It's Laura, you know—you can blame all this on her."

Bill Holloway climbed into the driver's side and slammed the door. He would have stayed on forever as the cossetted nephew/someday inheritor of the castle if it hadn't been for Laura. But the way she was poisoning Elizabeth's mind against him, in no time at all the will would be changed and that would be that—he would end up with nothing. This way everything would be his and poor accident-prone Laura would come a cropper long before she could ferret out his true identity. Though there shouldn't be too much worry about that—Bill Holloway and Malcolm had often been taken for brothers. He pressed down on the accelerator. He would have to stop thinking about the future and attend to the business at hand: undressing Elizabeth, Laura and the Kellys and putting them to bed just like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. There would be speculation as to how they got from the table into their own little beddy-byes but that would be forgotten when they found that Elizabeth's heart had stopped during the night.

After all the chores at the house were completed, it would take another hour and a half to strike and pack the carousel. By then the sandwiches and thermos of tea Mary had packed for him would come in handy. He wouldn't stop though, just eat them on the way. The farther he was from Clare when she was discovered, the better.

"IT WAS A GHOST THAT DID IT," MARY KELLY'S VOICE held conviction that brooked no contradiction.

"Oh Mary, Killbawn doesn't have a ghost—never did have," Laura said, waiting for the kettle to boil. She needed a cup of tea desperately.

"Then how do you explain sittin' at the table one minute and this mornin' wakin' up in bed—and he took off all me clothes." The last was whispered so close to Laura's ear she moved quickly away—too

quickly for the comfort of her throbbing head.

"Didn't your ghost undress Paddy, too?"

"Yes, umm, that proves it was a ghost." Mary made the tea and tucked the pot into a cozy to steep. "I can hardly wait to get down to the village and tell them about our ghost. You have no idea how embarrassed I'm after being—living in a castle with no ghost." All the while she was talking the doorbell was ringing in counterpoint.

"Enough, now, Mary. Please take Mrs. Winthrope her tea while I answer the door."

"I'm sorry to disturb so early," the uniformed man framed in the doorway said, the serious expression on his face belying the lightness of tone. "Can I come in for a minute?"

"Of course, Sergeant Foley, come into the morning room. I'll have Mary get you a cup of tea—I know I could use one."

"I've had me breakfast, thank you just the same." He paused, turning his hat in his hands. "It's about the nephew, Malcolm Carver—"

"Should I get Mrs. Winthrope? I'm sure she's awake," Laura said, alert now.

Sergeant Foley shook his head. "She'll be knowin' soon enough, poor lady."

"What about Malcolm? Has he had an accident? Look, I'll get my coat and be right with—"

"That won't be necessary—for now. He was drivin' that lorry of his, probably too fast for the road. You know the curve, the one near the black spot where so many lives have been lost?" Laura nodded. "He went off the road there. You'd best sit down." The sergeant settled Laura on the couch, pulled over a chair and sat down in front of her.

"Is he—"

"Yes. The lorry exploded and burned. There was nothing anyone could do, poor lad. God rest his soul."

"Mrs. MacDonald—Mrs. MacDonald?" Mary's voice sounded from somewhere over head.

"You'll have to forgive Mary; she thinks she met a ghost last—"

"It's Mrs. Winthrope! It's herself! Come quickly," Mary hurtled through the door screeching. "I think she's dead!"

Laura ran out of the room and up the stairs with Mary at her heels. "Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" Laura felt for a pulse. "Stop that sniveling, Mary, and tell Sergeant Foley to get Doctor McBride."

THE DOCTOR WAS CLOSED INTO ELIZABETH'S ROOM FOR what seemed like hours while Laura paced back and forth in the hall praying that her friend wouldn't die. Sergeant Foley had gone. Mary

was downstairs in the kitchen saying the rosary with her husband. At last the door opened and the doctor beckoned for her to come into the room.

"That was too close for comfort—I thought we'd lost her," he said in a voice so soft Laura had to strain to hear it.

"She'll be alright?"

"With care Mrs. Winthrope will be with us a good while. Right now rest is what she needs."

"May I sit with her? I'll stay very quiet."

"Of course. I'll be off now but I'll stop back around teatime." At the door the doctor turned back. "I don't think she should be told about her nephew—for a while anyway." Then the door closed and he was gone.

Now that she was alone, Laura stood for a few minutes listening to Elizabeth's soft breathing, her lips moving in a prayer of thanksgiving. She smoothed the pillow. She stroked a wisp of hair away from her friend's cheek. She went over to the window and as she did the clouds broke scattering sunshine over the wind-ruffled sea. After a while she went to sit beside the bed her hand resting on the counterpane.

"Sleep, my dear, rest will make you well." She spoke softly as to a beloved child. "And when you are well again Melda and I will take you for long walks like we used to. I'll read to you and bring you hot milk. Oh Elizabeth, it will be just like it used to be—the three of us, you, Melda and me and we'll be happy again the way we were before—" her voice broke off and her face darkened. She hoped Sergeant Foley hadn't noticed anything strange about the way she took the news of Malcolm's death. She hoped he had not noticed her relief when told that fire had destroyed him as well as the lorry. She hoped the paraquat added to the thermos of tea Mary had made didn't cause too much pain. "Yes, Elizabeth my dear, everything will be just the way it was," Laura said just before her eyes closed and she fell asleep, head against the wing of the chair.

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

Who was Rick Blaine?

The character portrayed by Humphrey Bogart in the movie Casablanca.

*My name is Jennifer, and things look bad now, but I know
Daddy will make everything all right!*

Final Score

by HAL CHARLES

JEFF COTTON WAS THE BEST PLAYER EVER TO COME OUT of basketball-crazy Clement County. I've heard my daddy say lots of times that he was as good in high school as King Kelly Coleman, Frank Beard, Cliff Hagan—even better, and Daddy had seen them all. Everybody who watched him was amazed by the way he seemed to glide through the air like a champion jumper at a steeplechase. And once he went up for his famous jump shot, you could put two points in the scorebook.

By the time he was in his last year at Woodhole High, there weren't enough rooms in the Starlite Motel to put all the recruiters who came to see him. Ben Jeffers, our postmaster, used to make special trips out to Jeff's house just to haul the sacks of letters from schools all over the country. Coach Mayfield once told Daddy that over three hundred colleges wanted Jeff to play for them.

Course I was interested in Jeff as more than a basketball player. I had known him since grade school, and we started going steady our sophomore year. From that night we'd first shown up at Kitty Graham's Halloween party—I remember Jeff was wearing the cashmere sweater I bought for him in Louisville—people knew we were meant for each other. All that year we were inseparable. We went to

Tommy's Drive-in together, studied together, and whenever Jeff played ball I was in the front row cheering him on. That summer Daddy gave him a job painting fences. Sutcliffe Stables is the biggest horse farm in central Kentucky, you know. Daddy even poured a concrete court out behind the garage, and when Jeff spent more time shooting than painting Daddy didn't seem to mind.

IT'S TOO BAD EVERYBODY WASN'T AS UNDERSTANDING as Daddy. Like Mr. Phillips the next fall. He had scheduled his biology test for Thursday. Wednesday night my cousin Susan in Lexington was having this barbecue. I couldn't wait for everyone up there to meet Jeff. Besides, it was a great way to celebrate our first "anniversary." Oh, I could understand why he didn't really want to go. First, I didn't have my license yet, but Daddy didn't care. Then too Jeff was always a little bashful around people he didn't know. Course he said it was that he needed to stay up and study for "Red-Pencil" Phillips' test. I finally talked him into going. The party was great, but even though I kept the speedometer on my MGB at 60, we didn't get home till after midnight.

The next day Jeff was really sweating as we stood outside Phillips' classroom.

"Take this," I said, kissing him on the cheek and handing him a slip of paper. "It's all you need."

"But this is a cheat-sheet, Jennifer."

"I know what it is, silly, and you know who won't be playing in the opening basketball game tomorrow night if he doesn't pass this test."

I could see the uncertainty in his blue eyes. To this day I can't understand how he could control things so well in a game, but off the court he had trouble making even the smallest decision. The bell rang and before he could say a word I hurried into the classroom.

Wouldn't you know it, Jeff got caught. I stayed after class to explain to Mr. Phillips about the circumstances, but he was new and from one of those schools up North and didn't even try to understand. Told me that he didn't care who I was, I wasn't going to talk him into changing his mind. Course Jeff didn't lie, didn't even try to defend himself—he just stood there and took it.

And Mr. Phillips went out of his way to cause trouble. He didn't just fail Jeff on the test; he went straight to Coach Mayfield. The coach was really strict—had a rule that if you fail a test, you sit out a game.

That's when the real trouble started. Friday night Woodhole without Jeff got humiliated by our arch-rival Somerville. The fans kept chanting for their star, but he just sat there in his street clothes behind the bench.

When the news of why Jeff wasn't playing swept through the stands, "Red-Pencil" became about as popular as a California horse that wins the Derby. Still Mayfield stuck to his guns, claiming he found it hard to believe Jeff would cheat, but what else could he do.

Daddy flew into one of his rages like he used to when Mother was around. Said he'd have Phillips' job. Called a meeting of the Board of Ed. They explained you can't fire a man who flunked a student for cheating, especially when the student wouldn't deny it.

Jeff was down for a long time after that. He worried too much about a little incident. He didn't even brighten up when the principal, acting on an anonymous tip, found some dirty pictures in Phillips' desk. The Board didn't take long to dismiss him, for as Daddy said, "A man like that's not fit to teach our fine children."

FROM THAT POINT ON JEFF KEPT MORE TO HIMSELF. Coach Mayfield called him a "gym rat." Jeff started hitching rides to get to school early for some extra practice. The coach gave him a key, and at night Jeff would set up chairs and dribble around them. To learn how to arc his shot over taller players he practiced shooting from behind a volleyball net. Even after home games, instead of going to Tommy's for a T-burger with the rest of the crowd, he stayed at the gym and shot. He seemed driven. I wanted to be with him, but any time I came into the gym when he was there alone he said he couldn't concentrate.

Normally I wouldn't be caught dead in Combs Dollar Store—you wouldn't believe the really tacky stuff they sell. I was desperate though. I had to find out what was wrong with Jeff, and his mother was a clerk there.

Mrs. Cotton had that look, the tired eyes that all those people in the hollow get from a life of scrimping and saving, but never having quite enough. She had to. Jeff's daddy died when we were in fifth grade. People said he wore himself out trying to hold down three jobs.

"These are really nice slacks," I said to her. "How much are they?"

"Why, Jennifer, what you doing here? I ain't seen much of you lately."

I forced a laugh. "That's because I haven't seen much of Jeff." Looking around to make sure no one was eavesdropping, I whispered, "You know how close Jeff and I have been, Mrs. Cotton. Tell me, is anything wrong with him? I mean, he's always alone. He's almost made a religion out of basketball, and everybody's worried about him."

"To tell the truth, Jennifer, I'm glad I got someone to talk to. Since

that cheating thing last fall, Jeff ain't been hisself. He don't talk much. At home he spends most of his time with Wimpy."

"His dog? But why?"

"I don't really know; but it 'pears to me he feels like he let the school, hisself down. All he ever said about that thing with Mr. Phillips was he cheated and he had to pay for it. You said he made a religion out of basketball. Well, I think the way he pushes hisself is his way of making up for what he did, what Reverend Mr. Wilkes calls 'atonement.' "

NOW I FIGURED THAT THE ONLY WAY JEFF COULD SHAKE his guilt was to get his mind off it. So Saturday morning after Jeff had scored 32 points in a romp over one of those hot-shot teams from Louisville, I drove out to the hollow. There was a sign on the covered bridge crossing the creek to the Cotton farm—NO CARS OR TRUCKS ON THE BRIDGE. I parked the MGB on the side and walked across the creaky planks. Before I even reached the run-down, white-frame house I heard that yelping from his dog. Just as I stepped into the sudden light, Wimpy jumped up, put his muddy paws on my Aigner coat, and started to drool on me.

"Get down, you stupid dog!" I yelled.

"He's happy to see you," Jeff called from the front porch. "What are you doing here?"

"Well," I smiled, "you've been keeping to yourself so much lately. I thought you needed a break. Daddy's not using his tickets for the game up in Lexington tonight, and you and I . . ."

"Listen, Jennifer." I could almost see my name crystallizing in the nippy morning air. "I don't have time. Coach Mayfield's got some film he wants me to look at today, then I got to shoot my free throws and run a few drills."

I don't mind telling you I was irritated with him. "Aren't you going a little overboard with this basketball stuff all the time? There's a lot more to this world than the inside of a gym, Jeff Cotton."

His face grew taut. "My dad taught me the only way to get what you want is to work for it. Besides, folks round here are counting on me, and I owe them. I owe myself from this moment on to be the best I can be."

"What about me? Don't you owe me something?"

"I tried doing things your way once, and it's not for me. I just can't cut corners and I don't feel comfortable with someone who does." He turned and walked inside, leaving me standing in the cold February air with that dumb dog.

I FOUND DADDY IN HIS STUDY. I HAD TO WAIT TILL HE finished talking to our trainer, who was racing some of our horses at Gulfstream. As long as I could remember, whenever I had a problem I went to Daddy and he made it right. I studied his muscular figure and weather-beaten face as he gave his final instructions to Jenkins. Where Daddy was concerned, there was no question who was boss.

"I don't care how much that horse means to you, Jenkins," Daddy said sternly. "Wildcat's Delite is a gelding with a broken leg. He's a liability. I want him destroyed—now." He slammed the phone down and turned to me.

"What can I do for you, honey?" He took my still-cold palm in his calloused hand and led me to the love-seat, the same one we had sat in so many times while Daddy listened to my problems with school, my friends, my mother. He was always on my side when those others told lies about me.

"It's about Jeff."

After I told him what had been happening, he drew me close and said, "Don't worry too much, honey. That Jeff of yours is a thoroughbred, and you've been around horses long enough to know they're high-strung, independent. Once in awhile you've got to give him his head or you'll break his spirit."

"But, Daddy?"

"Trust me," he said, brushing my thin, brown hair out of my face. "Since your mother went away, haven't I taken care of you, made sure you got everything you wanted? Listen, there are only two things that drive a boy in Kentucky crazy—basketball and girls. Jeff's all wrapped up in basketball now. Just wait—when the season's over, things will change."

THINGS DIDN'T CHANGE. OH, JEFF MADE ALL-STATE, THE Wolverines only lost in the regionals by one point, but we seemed to draw even further apart. Jeff became more of a loner. I got to where I'd park the car by the bridge and watch him shoot at a rusty metal rim stuck on the front of his barn. His only companion was that dumb dog of his.

No matter how I tried, I couldn't get Jeff interested in me. Still, I didn't give up. One day in late April while I was there again watching, Jeff came out of his house with a shotgun and whistled to Wimpy. I saw my chance as they came across the bridge.

"Where you going?" I asked cheerfully.

"Jennifer." He looked surprised. "What are you . . ."

"I was just driving by and thought I'd stop and see how you were.

You going hunting?"

"Wimpy and I have to shoot some rabbits. They've been tearing up the garden." He started down the road.

"Mind if I tag along?"

"Suit yourself."

As we walked across the field of daisies and bluebells, Jeff, silhouetted against the sky, seemed taller than ever. I had never really realized how much I wanted him till that moment.

"Find me a rabbit," he called out. "Go get him, boy!"

Within a minute that beagle started howling from the locust thicket.

"He's jumped one."

A rabbit bolted from the cover. Jeff raised his shotgun, fired, then ran up to where Wimpy was sniffing and barking. Putting the rabbit in his vest, he knelt down and hugged and patted the panting dog as though it were a loved one. "Get me another, you rascal."

Jeff was in another world as we crossed the sunlit field. In less than an hour he and Wimpy must have bagged half a dozen.

They were having so much fun I asked if I could try.

"Jeff, I've been hunting before with Daddy, lots of times. He's even given me my own gun."

Jeff looked at me like I was a referee who made a questionable call, then handed me the shotgun. "Now, when Wimpy jumps a rabbit," he said slowly and deliberately, "don't fire right at it. Lead it a bit."

I was nervous, but the 16 gauge felt good in my hands. I snapped it up against my shoulder a few times. It was a little heavy.

We hadn't gone forty yards before Wimpy started howling again. The tall grass in front of us rustled, then parted. Two streaks came tearing out.

"There it goes!"

I swung the shotgun in the direction of the two zig-zagging animals and pulled the trigger. Just then that stupid dog cut right in front of me.

Jeff's scream was louder than the shotgun blast. He ran to the brown and white animal, and picked it up, letting the dog's blood run over his vest and flannel shirt.

"Jeff, I'm sorry. It was an accident."

He didn't answer. He just stood up and, cradling that messy dog like a baby, headed back for the farm.

I DIDN'T SEE HIM AGAIN FOR QUITE AWHILE, BUT WHEN school opened for our senior year, we started spending lots of time together. I found out Jeff's schedule, so I changed mine to get the same

classes. Being so popular, Jeff had been elected Senior Class President, and with a lot of hard work and a little cutting of corners I became Secretary-Treasurer. By then the recruiters were flocking to Jeff like a crowd around the winner's circle at Churchill Downs. To try to take the pressure off Woodhole's star, Coach Mayfield and the president of the Wolverines Booster Club—Daddy, of course—screened all the recruiters. "Bird-dogs," Jeff called them.

I did my part to help. One of the ground rules was that the recruiters could meet with Jeff personally only if Daddy and the Coach were present, and all those interviews took place at Sutcliffe Stables. I was sort of unofficial hostess, and one of the Big Ten bird-dogs even said, "Jeff, you sure are lucky to have a girl like Jennifer to take care of you." A couple of them even tried to sell me on their schools, if you know what I mean. They must have guessed Jeff and I were going to the same college.

All Fall things went beautifully. Jeff was picked as the pre-season favorite to be Kentucky's Mr. Basketball. After his first four games, he was averaging 33 points, and the Lexington papers called him "unstoppable." One of those New York scouts labeled him a "Super-Blue," which Daddy said was really something. I could see our future was shaping up.

Then *she* made her move. Carol Devlin was a cheerleader with bottle-blond hair, who was popular with all the ballplayers, if you catch my meaning. Everywhere Jeff went, she stalked him with phony smiles and unbuttoned blouses. I could tell Jeff didn't want to have anything to do with her, but she kept throwing herself at him. If I knew Butch Amburgey and Johnny Olliver—they were on the team with Jeff—I'd bet my last blue ribbon those two troublemakers kept egging Jeff on, daring him to take Carol up on her obvious offer.

After the Madison Central game one Friday night, I talked Kitty into taking me with her to Jill Riddell's house. Jill's parents were spending the weekend in Cincinnati, and the gang was going to party. We only had to wait a few minutes before in came the team and cheerleaders. I rushed up to Jeff and kissed him.

Suddenly a hand pushed me away. "Back off, Jennifer!"

That witch had some nerve. She stuck her arm through Jeff's and nuzzled up real close. "What do you think you're doing, Carol?" I said angrily.

"You certainly don't own him, Little Miss Rich-girl," she spat back.

I stared up at Jeff. "Well, is she speaking for you?"

He wouldn't look at me. His blue eyes just shifted back and forth like they did that time outside of "Red-Pencil's" classroom.

"Come on, Jeff," Carol urged, "we can be alone in the den." She pulled on Jeff's arm and he followed. From the way he glanced over his shoulder, though, I knew he really didn't want to go.

I was so mad at Jeff for not standing up to that little tease that I wouldn't have talked to him even if he had called. And Carol made everything worse by rubbing it in my face. At Tommy's Drive-in she draped herself over him like a saddle blanket. And both Jill and Kitty told me Carol had let everybody know Jeff was spending a lot of time over at her house. I was mad enough at her, then one night at the Danville game the cheerleaders were doing a cheer that always turned the crowd on. Except Carol changed the words and shouted them right in my face: "Jeff, Jeff, he's *my* man. He can do it like nobody can."

SHE HAD IT COMING. HER FATHER WAS REALLY TO BLAME because he's the one who bought her that beat-up old Mustang convertible. Then there was the fog down in the hollow most mornings, and Carol running after Jeff every second. Course the whole thing might not have happened, Sheriff Terrell said, if some of the trash down in the hollow hadn't been up to their usual pranks. The day after Carol got her "new" car, I just know she couldn't wait to impress Jeff. So about the time the sun was coming up she took her first drive down to his farm.

The way Sheriff Terrell explained it to Daddy, she got to the covered bridge, and because the warning sign had been removed, she started across. About half way over those old planks collapsed. Jeff was the one who found the Mustang upside down in the dry creek bed.

The Sheriff suspected Butch and Johnny of stealing the sign. It wouldn't have been the first time they had caused trouble with their horsing around, he said.

I didn't go to her funeral. I can't really say I even felt that bad about what had happened.

Jeff's reaction was different. It couldn't have been that he cared for that mare in heat, but Coach Mayfield said that he started playing like a man possessed. In practice he fought for every loose ball, made every play as if it were the last of the state championship. And in the games Jeff never smiled. He got on his teammates when they gave less than one hundred percent. He even begged the coach to keep him in the game when the Wolverines were up by twenty or thirty points. He lived for basketball, and when the games were over he disappeared.

We made the Sweet Sixteen, and even though Jeff put on what one reporter called "the greatest performance in State Tournament history," we got knocked off in the semi-finals. Jeff was All-

Tournament, All-State, and was later named Mr. Basketball.

THE BOOSTER CLUB SPRANG A SURPRISE ON JEFF AT Awards Night the next month. Daddy had Carey's Bakery cook up the biggest sheetcake anyone in Woodhole had ever seen. It looked like a huge basketball court and took up two picnic tables. I cut a piece for everybody at the banquet, but most people being basketball crazy said they were going to freeze theirs to remember Jeff by. Course Jeff won an armload of trophies. What got to him the most, though, was the blue and gold road signs Mayor Davy said would be placed at both ends of town: WELCOME TO WOODHOLE, HOME OF JEFF COTTON. The Mayor joked that everybody knew where Jeff would be playing his college ball, so when he brought his teammates down the road, they'd be able to see how his hometown felt about him.

But the highlight of the banquet for me came during the Mayor's speech when Jeff leaned over and whispered there was something very important he had to talk to me about after the ceremonies were over.

I don't remember the rest of the awards. I knew what Jeff wanted to tell me. I had waited since our sophomore year to hear it. Daddy would be overjoyed. He already thought of Jeff as a son.

While I waited for Jeff after the banquet, I tried to straighten things up in the empty gymnasium. I looked down at the picnic tables. All that remained from a beautiful evening were the icing-covered knife and a few scattered crumbs. I was thinking about all the good times we'd had in that gym when the metal doors at the other end creaked open.

Like a proud thoroughbred in a parade to the post, he walked across the hardwood floor toward me. But, as soon as he got close, I could tell by his shifting blue eyes something was wrong.

"I don't know the best way to put it, Jennifer," he said hesitantly.

"Just tell me, tell me how you feel. Heaven knows how long I've waited for you to say how much you love and want me."

"But, that's not . . ."

"How we can go to school together. You can play ball, graduate, then go to work for Daddy. Sutcliffe Stables will be ours someday, you know."

"Wait a minute. You've got it all wrong. What I wanted to tell you so that you could pass it on to your father is that last night I signed a national letter-of-intent with a school in upstate New York."

"You did? Well, I guess that's O.K. I can get used to snow. I'm sure it'll hurt Daddy and some townsfolk, but when he sees it's what we want . . ."

"It's not," his voice echoed through the empty gym. "It's what I

want. I want to get away from Woodhole, from bad memories of a girl I cared for, from your Daddy . . . from . . . you."

"You what?"

"Jennifer, all your life you've gotten everything you wanted, no matter what it took. You wanted me, and even though I told you I wasn't interested, you did everything you could to get me. It never mattered to you what *I* wanted."

Something clicked in my head like an unseen door opening. Who did he think he was talking to me like that? The last person who spoke that way was that witch Carol Devlin. And before that, my mother.

"It's over, Jennifer," he said softly. "There's nothing you can do."

JEFF WAS WRONG. THEY WERE ALL WRONG. I COULD DO plenty to those who got in my way. Where were "Red-Pencil," Carol Devlin, even that dumb dog of his now?

Mother was wrong about me too. Always nagging Daddy to get me "professional" help. There was nothing the matter with me. *She* was the weak one. Daddy knew that too. Why else would he have divorced her?

And Daddy'll take care of his little girl one more time just as he always has. Besides, wasn't he the one who told me what to do with a useless thoroughbred? And didn't he tell me things would be O.K. when he called Sheriff Terrell?

So I'll just sit here till the Sheriff pays us a call. I am getting kind of hungry, but after I used that knife on Jeff, it wouldn't have been right to use it to cut myself a piece of cake, would it? ●

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

Who was the good guy opposing the evil Technological Hierarchy for the Removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity?

Our hero was The Man from U.N.C.L.E., played by actor Robert Vaughn.

Universal Export is the cover organization for what group?

The British secret 000 operations, of which James Bond is a member.

I sighed. First a suicide, and now somebody pointing a gun in my face. It was a busy day!

Over A Barrel

by TERRY BLACK

THE FIRST TIME I EVER VISITED NIAGARA FALLS, I SPENT fifteen minutes trying to talk someone out of jumping into them.

Purely by chance. I got in late Thursday, all set for a fun-filled three-day weekend at the hottest spots in town. Continental Mutual was springing for the hotel room and three squares a day, so all I had to do was check in and enjoy myself. But first I had to see the falls.

I left the Pacer in the hotel garage and wandered out onto the concourse, smelling the cold bite of waterfall mist, hearing its turbulent roar. After a bit of exploring I found an empty spot where I could lean against the safety rail and contemplate the pounding waters far below. The falls were filled with little spangles of reflected light from the roving spotlights behind me.

I must have been there half an hour before I realized I wasn't alone.

THE OTHER GUY WAS ABOUT TEN YARDS TO MY LEFT. HE was average height and build, with horn-rim glasses and a tan wind-breaker. He had bushy, muttonchop sideburns. I could tell he wasn't just another tourist because he was on the wrong side of the rail.

And instead of leaning on it he was clinging to it, hanging suspended over 167 feet of moist air.

We noticed each other at the same time, but he spoke first. "I'm going to jump," he said.

"You can't," I blurted.

"I see what you mean," he said thoughtfully. "I should have said,

'I'm going to let go and fall.' But surely my goal is clear."

And it was. The falls swirled far below, all but invisible in the fog and the darkness. They sounded like a million people applauding. The rail was slippery with moisture.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked.

He shifted his grip. "Do you care?"

"Look, it can't be that bad," I said, groping for words. He was probably bluffing but he was all set to go, hanging there in the breeze with acres of nothing below him. I tried soft-pedaling the guy. "Listen, if you'll just climb back up and go sleep it off, I'm sure you'll feel much—"

"Blow it out your earlobe," he said.

I HESITATED, WONDERING WHAT TO DO. I KNEW ALL THE things I *shouldn't* do: antagonize him, laugh at him, ignore him. But that seemed to eliminate most of the options. I decided to play for time.

"What upset you?" I asked.

He let go with one hand to scratch his nose. "My business is failing."

"What business?"

"It's a novelty shop, LAFF-A-LOT GAGS 'N THINGS. For three months running we haven't made a dime. We can't even sell rubber fake hands anymore; used to be you could always sell rubber fake hands. Kids these days, they don't care any more; all they want to do is play video games. What's going to happen when they get old and all the grown-ups want to do is play video games?"

"Why don't you wait and see?"

"Can't. I've got a date at the bottom of the falls. Here I come," he bellowed, shifting his grip again, "Joey Morton's on his—"

"Wait!" I cried, lurching forward. "What about your loved ones? How will they feel? Think what you're doing to them!"

"It's because of them I'm doing this," he said. "This is the only way I can help them."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm insured for a fortune," he explained. "Once I'm gone, they won't have a worry in the world."

"But you can't collect on a suicide. They'll never see a penny."

"So who says it's suicide? For all they know I slipped on a banana peel. The only guy knows otherwise is you, and you got no reason to open your mouth. So this goes on the books as an unsolved crime, the missus gets a bundle and the only folks any poorer are the suckers at Continental Mutual—"

"Wait!" I broke in. "I'm from Continental Mutual. I work there."

I'm a claims adjuster, my name's Marv Drexler and I'm here on vacation but—"

"Sorry," he said pleasantly, "I don't believe you."

And he let go.

I ALMOST CAUGHT HIM. ACTUALLY, I ALMOST *DIDN'T* catch him. I dove for the rail and I never would have made it but his jacket caught on something, caught and held and tore loose, but by then I was close enough to grab his hand and hang on for dear life, braced against the rail.

My fingers were slippery with sweat and mist, but I managed to keep my grip. His hand was firm in mine.

But the rest of him kept on falling.

Joey Morton's body plunged screaming down the cliffside, smashed into an outcrop and rebounded crazily into a gray wall of churning, frothy water.

I looked at the hand I was holding. It was molded from skin-colored rubber. On its bottom was a stamped logo that said LAFF-A-LOT GAGS 'N THINGS, NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK.

"HE'S LYING," SAID JOEY MORTON'S WIFE, THELMA. "HE made up the whole damned thing."

We were sitting in the County Sheriff's Office, eight hours later. The sheriff, a gangly fellow named Hiram Flatts, had rushed out to the scene of the incident and escorted me back to the station house, where I related the grim story to a stenographer and two detectives and signed a typed statement repeating it.

Thelma Morton showed up as I was leaving. She wasn't sad. She was angry. And her anger was focused on Mrs. Drexler's little boy Marv.

"You won't get away with this," she spluttered, stabbing a finger into my breastbone. "If you think you can dodge Joey's claim with this whacko suicide story, you'd better think again."

"But I'm only saying what I—"

"Cram it," she said, cutting me off. "I know what's going on here. You're working with the Boyd twins to put LAFF-A-LOT out of business. They don't want us to get the insurance money, so they brought you in to discredit the claim."

I frowned. "Who are the Boyd twins?"

"Morton's competitors," said Hiram Flatts. "They run JOY-BUZZ INDUSTRIES, across the street from LAFF-A-LOT. Joey and the Boyds have been fighting it out for years." He shrugged. "Looks like that's all over now."

"Don't bet on it, sheriff," said Thelma. Her nostrils flared like a leopard smelling something soft and tasty. "Fair warning, Drexler. If you won't change your story, I'll *make* you change it. Joey's insurance money is mine, and I plan to get it—whatever it takes."

She turned and stomped away, slamming the door so hard a pin popped in one of the hinges.

"Quite a woman," said Hiram Flatts, thumbing his chin. "If I had a wife like that I believe I'd jump into the falls, too."

I stood up to leave. "Are we finished here? I have to call my boss about all this."

"Here," said Flatts, handing me his phone. "Dial 9 for an outside line. Only don't talk too long, I've got a budget to keep."

I nodded and dialed. J.B. wasn't happy to hear from me—he always seems to expect the worst—but when I said I could save him a bundle, he cheered up some. After I told him the story he seemed almost pleasant. "Just make sure," he warned, "you stay alive long enough to testify at the coroner's inquest. After that, I don't care."

I hung up and was turning to leave when for the second time, something stopped me. This time it was one of Flatt's deputies, blocking the doorway. He looked a little sick.

"We found the body," he said.

JOEY MORTON WAS A MESS.

The falls had made short work of him, grinding up the body like so much Polish sausage. Every bone in his body was broken at least once, and his left foot was shorn off clean at the ankle. His back was bent like a scrub brush; ribs poked up from under his jacket, evenly spaced, like a turkey the day after Thanksgiving.

A piece of rock had caught him square in the face, tearing a gouge from chin to forehead. His skin was the texture of sardines. But there was no mistaking those bushy, muttonchop sideburns.

"That's him," I said.

The sheriff nodded and pulled a sheet over Morton's ruined features. "I sort of figured it would be. The fingerprints match Morton's perfectly. You want a ride back to the falls?"

WHEN I GOT BACK TO THE HOTEL, MY CAR HAD A PARKING ticket. Suddenly I realized I wasn't a registered guest. In all the confusion I'd forgotten to check in.

I dragged my luggage up to the lobby and presented myself at the front desk. The clerk was a tall man with curly hair and sallow, pinched features. I waved the parking ticket in his face and said, "Can you fix

this?"

No," he said. "Single or double?"

"But I wasn't parked illegally! I came to register at this hotel."

"You have to leave the validation ticket under your windshield," he explained. "Single or double?"

"How could I have a validation ticket if I hadn't registered yet?"

"You should have registered sooner."

"I was reporting a suicide!"

"You should have reported it sooner. Single or double?"

At last I gave in and signed into Room 325, overlooking the falls. I had to carry my own luggage because the doorman was sick, or something, and I was thoroughly spent by the time I lurched into my room and dropped three suitcases by the bedside.

I could have slept for a week. But I only got an hour, because that's when someone started banging on my door yelling, "Room service."

I ducked under the covers and waited for him to go away. He didn't. Finally I climbed out of bed, still dressed, and shambled over to open the door.

"I don't need any—" I began.

Then I stopped. Because my visitor wasn't dressed like a bellboy. He wore a black leather jacket and nylon gloves. On his face was a Lone Ranger mask. In his hand was snub-nosed .38, centered on my chest.

"What's going on?" I gasped.

"You're about to take diving lessons," he said.

HE LOOKED FAMILIAR SOMEHOW, ALTHOUGH FOR THE life of me I couldn't place where I'd ever seen him. The Lone Ranger mask didn't hide his face as well as he seemed to think it would. But instead of pondering it I decided to try and stay alive.

"Give me your car keys," he said, stepping into the room.

I gave them to him, backing away. "What's this all about?"

"It's simple, Marv," he said reasonably. "We want you to stay quiet. But you don't seem like a quiet kind of guy. So we're going to change that."

"Can't we talk about this?"

"Nope. I'm taking no chances with this one. Gus thought I'd screw it up; he says I'm just a dumb retard. But he's a fine one to talk. Gus is plumb loco, out of his head, fodder for the crazy bin. I don't know how he talked me into this."

"It's not too late to back out," I said.

He shook his head and wagged his gun. "Forget it, Marv. Let's go."

My mind was racing like a greyhound. I wonder what I could pos-

sibly use for a weapon. About the only thing was the Swiss army knife in my windbreaker, on the bed. It had not only a knife blade but a corkscrew, scissors and a magnifying glass. I wasn't sure how I'd use them but it was better than nothing.

"I'll get my jacket," I said, reaching across the bed. I grabbed the windbreaker, fingers groping into the inside pocket—

Until I felt his gun-muzzle against the back of my neck.

"Pull it out, slowly," he said. His voice was perfectly calm; he hadn't been fooled for an instant. Without even breathing I pulled out the knife and held it up between two fingers.

The Lone Ranger let out a laugh. "Is that all?" he said, snickering. He shook his head, took a step backward, and tripped over a suitcase.

The gun went off. I'm not sure what it hit but I thought I heard glass break. I surged up off the bed and kicked the gun out of his hand, losing my balance, too. Then we were down on the floor, scrambling around, groping for the gun like a fumbled football.

I got it first. I pointed it in his direction and he turned chalk-white. But instead of sitting still he sprang up and bolted for the door. I pointed the gun at the ceiling and fired a warning shot, but I'd never used a gun before and nobody had told me about recoil.

The .38 bucked in my hand, practically spraining my thumb. I yelled something suitable and switched gunhands, racing out into the corridor after the Lone Ranger. He was gone but the stairwell door was still swinging shut behind him.

I burst through it onto the third floor landing, hearing loud footsteps below me. I took off after him, nursing my thumb, trying not to fall down the stairs. By the time I hit the parking garage his advantage was a good fifty feet.

He got to the Pacer long before I did, but he couldn't seem to find the right key. Frantically he tried key after key as I puffed up, brandishing the gun. Then he found the right one, jumped in and hit the ignition.

I was still nowhere near him. I wasn't even close enough to get hurt when the car exploded.

All I felt was a solid wall of furnace heat, followed by a rippling haze and the thud-WHAM! of a shock wave. I fetched up against a Buick and slumped there, sick and groggy, watching as my Pacer burnt itself up under a dense column of smoke, taking the hapless Lone Ranger with it.

After a while someone called the police.

"LOOKS OPEN AND SHUT TO ME," SAID HIRAM FLATTS,

pouring himself a coffee. He offered me one but I shook my head. "He was going to take you somewhere and blow you up in your car, but he panicked and blew himself up instead."

I sat back in my chair, feeling very tired. "What was his motive?"

"Why, to keep you from exposing the suicide. Thelma said she wanted to stop you, said it right in front of me."

"But why get in the car if he knew there was a bomb in it? Why not just run like hell?"

"I don't know." Flatts shrugged. "You got a better story?"

I rubbed my temples, fighting back an incredible headache. I could see there was no choice but to explain the whole thing, so I nodded and said, "Yeah."

"Well, let's hear it then," said Flatts. "What do you think happened after Joey Morton's suicide?"

"That's just it, sheriff. Joey Morton didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

FLATTS DROPPED HIS COFFEE CUP. I THINK HE MUST have burnt his hand but he probably never felt it. He made a ferocious face and said, "Dammit, Marv, you said he jumped into the falls right in front of you! Were you lying about that?"

"No, not exactly. I told you what I thought I saw, what I was meant to see. The whole thing was staged for my benefit."

"Then it wasn't a suicide?"

"Yes, it was. I watched someone throw himself into the falls, ending his own life. But not Joey Morton. Morton was already dead, hours before I got there."

"Then who jumped into the falls?"

"I'm coming to that. You see, the first time I saw the Lone Ranger, I thought he looked familiar. Drove me nuts, trying to figure out where I'd seen him before. Finally it came to me."

"Where was it?"

"I'll answer your question with a question. Morton's competitors, the Boyd brothers. Were they identical twins?"

"Yes, but—"

"That's where. The Lone Ranger looked familiar because I'd already seen his brother Gus."

"But where?"

"At the falls. Don't you see? The Boyds and Joey Morton had been fighting for years. And Gus Boyd was a psychopath, certifiably nuts—at least, that's what his brother said. So one day he flipped completely and killed Joey to put him out of business. Then he realized it

wouldn't work, because Joey's fat insurance policy would keep LAFF-A-LOT running forever."

Flatts started to speak, thought better of it.

"But Gus was determined to bankrupt them. Even at the cost of his own life. So when he found out a Continental Mutual agent was visiting Niagara, he posed as Joey Morton and killed himself in front of me, hoping to void the claim."

Flatts dropped his coffee cup again. "You're crazy, Marv. Gus Boyd doesn't even *look* like Joey!"

"He didn't have to. All he needed were fake sideburns and a water-soluble adhesive. He probably got them from his own novelty shop. In the fading light they'd look just like real—but once they hit the water, they'd be gone."

"Slow down a minute, Marv. The sideburns on the body were genuine. And the fingerprints were Morton's!"

"Of course. That was Morton's *real* body. Gus messed up its face and dumped it into the falls, hours earlier. Once it turned up, he knew I'd see the sideburns and match it with the suicide."

"But what about Gus' body, the one you really saw?"

"What about it? It's still out there somewhere, waiting to be found. Though even if you find it I wouldn't know it without the sideburns. To me it'd be just another corpse."

Flatts rubbed his neck. "One thing I still don't follow: why kill you? How does it help them?"

"Their motive was the opposite of what we thought. They didn't want to hide the 'suicide'—they wanted to expose it, get my story out, then kill me as suspiciously as possible to attract attention."

I shook my head.

"But Thelma didn't know that. She thought the suicide was real, thought it would louse up the insurance. So to keep me quiet she put a bomb in my car and wired up the ignition, not realizing it would kill the other Boyd twin. End of story, sheriff." I sat back and closed my eyes.

"Well, I'm damned," said Flatts in amazement. "Thelma and the Boyds were *both* trying to kill you—for exactly opposite reasons!"

YOU'D THINK I'D BE REWARDED FOR THESE INCREDIBLE deductions, but no such luck. When J.B. found out, he blew a gasket. I could see his point: we had an air-tight reason not to pay an enormous claim, and Good Old Marv has to screw it up. Thanks to me, Thelma Morton will have a fortune waiting when she gets out of jail in a quarter of a century.

J.B. would probably have let it go, though, if I hadn't added insult to

injury two days later. You see, I needed a car to get home. And the Pacer I had to replace was insured through Continental Mutual.

So J.B. wired me the money with an accompanying note. It said, ENJOY THE FALLS BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO CATCH HELL THE NEXT TIME YOU SET FOOT IN THIS OFFICE.

I still haven't decided if I'll go back or not. Niagara's sort of fun, now that no one's trying to kill me. But my vacation fund won't last forever, and once it gives out the Old Man'll have me over a barrel. ●

WHO WAS THAT MASKED MAN?

Clues

Nowhere in the pages of history can one find a greater champion of justice!

... mysterious character who aids the forces of law and order!

He hunts the biggest of all game—public enemies who try to destroy America!

The fox, so cunning and free

Suspects

CAPTAIN AMERICA

ZORRO

CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT

THE GREEN HORNET

THE PHANTOM
DETECTIVE

THE LONE RANGER

BATMAN

THE SHADOW

THE SPIDER

ANSWERS

The Lone Ranger . . . The Shadow . . . The Green Hornet . . . Zorro

Her suspicions were not enough. The police needed more—solid proof of who was doing these terrible things!

Positive Identification

by MICHAEL S. SMITH

MRS. ELLA ROCKWELL STOOD IN HER DRIVEWAY, CURSING because she couldn't go to church. She had come out of her house on Sunday morning, eased onto the chilly vinyl upholstery of her old Plymouth, and turned the ignition key to absolute silence. It was then that she noticed the slightly raised hood. Opening the hood, she discovered a square empty space where her new battery had been.

"This happens all over," Patrolman Ernie Pilsen explained. He arrived two hours after a wrecker hauled the Plymouth away. "Even in Beverly Hills and Bel Air. Even in *my* neighborhood."

"It didn't happen in this neighborhood until a month ago," Mrs. Rockwell said. "And I want something done about it."

Pilsen guessed that Mrs. Rockwell was around sixty. Stout. White hair. Blue eyes, in a face that had aged gracefully. Except for a strong trace of the South in her speech, she reminded Pilsen of his grandmother.

"You want to sign a complaint?" he asked.

"Yes. But I can't quite catch him."

"Who?"

"Him." She indicated a brown stucco house next door.

"One of your neighbors?"

"I wouldn't call 'em neighbors. They just happen to live beside me . . . all eight of 'em. And they are absolute trash." She pronounced the last word like an awful, immutable curse.

Pilsen glanced over the redwood fence separating the two houses. Nice color for a lawn, he thought—khaki. Looks like it hasn't been watered since Kennedy was president. And why do they have a TV set on the front porch? A second look told him the TV set was missing its picture tube.

"That was a real nice house," Mrs. Rockwell said. "Till the Rainey's moved in."

In the driveway, a rusty pick-up truck sat beside an old Cadillac. A '58 Fleetwood, Pilsen noted . . . worth some money if it ran. But the Cadillac squatted on four cement blocks, surrounded by its own greasy innards. Both the truck and the disemboweled Cadillac carried Alabama license plates.

"I grew up in Georgia," Mrs. Rockwell said. "I had some neighbors like the Rainey's back there. I *know* their kind. They are common, sorry, and lazy . . . wouldn't hit a lick at a snake if it was ready to strike. And one of them stole my battery."

"Anybody could've stolen your battery."

"Anybody didn't. Cecil Rainey did. He's about eighteen or nineteen, I'd say. Their oldest young'un. Tall as you are, officer, and weighs about three hundred pounds. Looks like he was raised on R.C. Cola and Moon Pies."

"Did you see him messing around with your car?"

"No."

"Did anybody else see him?"

"Not that I know of. But I know he steals. A lot of things have turned up missing around here lately . . ."

"Mrs. Rockwell . . ."

"Bicycles. Tools . . ."

"I have to tell you something you're not gonna like. I know how you feel about your car; I had a tape deck stolen out of my car once, and it was parked at the L.A. County Courthouse. But tape decks and batteries . . . that's petty theft. We don't have the people or the time to do a whole lot about it."

"It's not just the stealing." Mrs. Rockwell glanced around furtively. "There's a lady down the street. Mrs. Maltz. She's a widow-woman like me. Cecil poisoned her dog."

"You saw him do that?"

"Not exactly. But about the same time that dog died, I found a box of rat poison in the Rainey's garbage can."

"So you looked through their garbage . . ."

"Course not! I just happened to be taking my garbage out, and I saw the empty box."

A FEW FEET AWAY, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE REDWOOD fence, Cecil Rainey was smiling. And remembering, as he listened to Mrs. Rockwell.

Miserable critter, he thought. Almost as old as old lady Maltz . . . overdue for its trip to doggy heaven. Sure took it a long time to die. Kept looking up at me, like it expected me to do something for it . . . and I guess I did.

Cecil's smile grew wider.

Guess I'll have to do something for old lady Rockwell, too.

"Y'all take two hours to get here," Mrs. Rockwell was saying, "and then tell me you can't do anything."

"Sorry I took so long," Pilsen said. "I had to make a stop on the way. Last night, about five blocks from here, there was a rape. The victim's neighbor found her this morning . . . in an alley between two apartment buildings . . ."

"I realize . . ."

"The victim was eleven years old." Pilsen glanced down the street. It was—with one exception—a neighborhood of well-trimmed green lawns and neat houses. Palm trees stood at graceful attention along the sidewalk.

"This is a nice area . . ." Pilsen began.

"It used to be."

" . . . compared to some parts of Devonshire Division. You're lucky."

"I am not lucky. Me and Mister Rockwell (God rest) moved into this house over twenty years ago. In 1963, when Lockheed transferred us to Los Angeles. We worked hard to have a decent home . . . and a decent neighborhood."

"I sympathize, Mrs. Rockwell, But you've told me yourself, you've never actually seen anything. If you get some positive identification of your . . . uh . . . suspect, give us a call."

"And wait two hours for you to get here?"

"If it's urgent, you won't wait any two hours."

I hope, Pilsen added to himself, as he started the car.

"Bye, Mrs. Rockwell."

"I'm obliged," she said, with more than a hint of sarcasm. Behind the fence, Cecil Rainey was still smiling.

THE NEW BATTERY COST SEVENTY-FOUR DOLLARS AND change. Mrs. Rockwell resigned herself to Plain-Wrap macaroni-and-cheese suppers for a while. She didn't risk parking the car in the driveway again, though angling it into the cluttered garage was tricky.

I ought to have a garage sale, she thought, as she inched the Plymouth between an old mattress and a stack of cardboard boxes.

Course, I've been telling myself that for the past three weeks. Ever since I started using the garage again.

She carried a single bag of groceries into the house and put them away. A new box of tissues went on the nightstand beside her bed; the out-of-sorts feeling she'd had for the past few days had finally erupted into a nasty head cold.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Rockwell was propped in bed, sipping a mixture of hot water, lemon juice, and bourbon. She watched *The Best Years Of Our Lives* on the small TV set at the foot of the bed. She remembered seeing the movie with her husband in 1946, at the Peachtree Theater in Visalia, Georgia.

In the Rainey house, Cecil kept watch from a darkened window. Pulling the black leather glove away from his left wrist, he checked the digital watch he'd stolen from a drugstore.

Nine-thirty, he thought. She don't usually stay up much later'n ten. Any time now.

When the movie ended, Mrs. Rockwell took a Bible from the nightstand. She turned to the Book of Job, which always cheered her up when she thought *she* had it bad.

He deceiveth the devices of the crafty, she read, And maketh their hands unfit for their tasks.

At fifteen minutes before midnight, when the lights in Mrs. Rockwell's bedroom had been off for more than an hour, Cecil Rainey crept silently into her back yard. He was smiling in the dark.

NO SMELL SWEETER THAN HAY. IN HER DREAMS, MRS. Rockwell was nineteen years old, bouncing in the back of a farm truck loaded with hay on a moon-flooded night.

No smell sweeter than hay in early summer, after the rain and before the dog days. Bobby King borrowed his daddy's truck and bought the hay from Old Man Tollison . . . the hay, and a pint of moonshine. For a church hayride! And I can see you like it was yesterday, Lee Rockwell. I don't remember the year, but the month was June . . .

Cecil felt the back door bump against a chain lock. He slipped a heavy pair of wire cutters from his back pocket.

You were home on leave, Mrs. Rockwell said in her dream. You'd

been wounded, on some island in the Pacific. Mama said I should stay away from you . . .

The cutters snicked efficiently through the thin chain. Cecil stepped into Mrs. Rockwell's kitchen.

. . . because you were older than me, and you'd been off in the war. She didn't know how shy you were. I nearly had to crawl in your lap to get your attention . . .

Smiling, Mrs. Rockwell awoke. She lay on her side, her arms folded across her chest, as though holding someone sleeping beside her. She opened her eyes and saw a massive shadow fall across the bedroom door.

Mrs. Rockwell opened her mouth to scream. A hoarse croak came out.

Cecil Rainey crossed the room in one step, reaching for a pillow.

He closed her mouth with one gloved hand. Mrs. Rockwell instinctively brought a knee up. The mattress attenuated the move, but the jolt loosened Cecil's hold for a moment.

Her fingers arced into his face, drawing blood. He yelped. Shoving with all her strength, Mrs. Rockwell launched herself off the bed.

Half-blind, wiping blood from his eyes, Cecil kicked. His boot caught her in the stomach with an ugly thump, slamming her into the floor.

Gasping for breath, Mrs. Rockwell hobbled into the hall.

If I can just make it to the back door . . .

Cecil grabbed a heavy lamp from the nightstand, ripping the cord out of its socket. He charged down the hall.

Mrs. Rockwell dropped when she heard the heavy footsteps lumbering behind her. Cecil overshot her and his bulk crashed to the floor. Mrs. Rockwell stayed down, scuttling for the sliver of light showing through the kitchen door.

Effortlessly, Cecil grabbed both her ankles in one big hand. He hauled her toward him as easily as a child pulling in a kite-string and got an arm around her throat, dragging her into the kitchen.

The knives . . .

Cecil slammed her head into the cold tile of the counter. Through a red haze, Mrs. Rockwell saw him choose the longest knife in the wall rack. She grabbed for something to lever herself away from him. But he was stronger. When he yanked her away from the counter, a spice rack that been nailed into the wall for twenty years came with her.

In the corner of her eye, she saw the blade wink as Cecil drew it back. He forced her head up, exposing her throat.

Mrs. Rockwell closed her eyes. She threw a container from the spice

rack backwards, into Cecil's face. The smell told her it was cayenne pepper.

The knife clattered to the floor. Mrs. Rockwell tried to follow the sound. Cursing and weeping, Cecil pinned her down with a knee in her back. Her hand found the knife, but a bigger hand closed over hers.

A long, inhuman scream split the calm night air.

"GOOD GOD," ERNIE PILSEN WHISPERED, MORE PRAYER than curse. He and his partner stood in Mrs. Rockwell's kitchen. The floor was gummy with blood, and a red trail led out the kitchen door.

"Well, young man," said Mrs. Rockwell, from the gurney where two paramedics had placed her, "there's your positive identification."

She pointed to a swollen black leather glove on the floor.

"Do you reckon five fingerprints'll be enough?"

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

The Rock was the nickname for what federal prison?

Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay.

What is the brand name of James Bond's cigarette lighter?

007 uses a Ronson.

What was the name of Rosemary's Baby?

He was named Andrew John.

All TV viewers saw of detective Richard Diamond's switchboard operator were her legs. Whose legs were they?

They belonged to Mary Tyler Moore—and probably still do!

How many pints of blood are there in the human body?

The average human body contains twelve pints of blood.

MYSTERY ANIMALS

1. Nick and Nora Charles had a pet pooch named:

- a) Shasta
 - b) Asta
 - c) Pasta
 - d) Fasta
-

2. Bulldog Drummond's black cocker spaniel was named:

- a) Tess
 - b) Bess
 - c) Mess
 - d) Confess
-

3. In the Sherlock Holmes adventure THE SPECKLED BAND, the creature featured was:

- a) a spider
 - b) a snake
 - c) an octopus
 - d) a caterpillar
-

4. Who was the lead husky in the dog sled operated by radio's Sergeant Preston of the Yukon?

- a) Rex, the Wonder Dog
 - b) Yukon King
 - c) Rin Tin Tin
 - d) Eskimo Pie
-

5. In the James Bond movies, SPECTRE chief Ernst Stavro Blofield had as a pet:

- a) a black panther
 - b) a white cat
 - c) a brown doberman
 - d) a monty python
-

6. The *Murders in the Rue Morgue* were committed by what animal?

- a) a grizzly bear
 - b) a gorilla
 - c) a wolf
 - d) a giant rat
-

ANSWERS

The correct answer is b) for each question.

All right, I admit it: I'm acting paranoid. I keep looking into other people's eyes for hidden meanings to their words!

Shape Up Or Ship Out

by LUCY C. BEEBE

"FRANK CAVANAUGH," I TOLD MYSELF, "YOU'RE ACTING paranoid!"

Paranoia is not cost efficient. It is depreciating my time and energy. I'd much rather invest heavily in rewarding emotions like greed or love. Instead here I am—a major stockholder in paranoia.

It all began five days ago on Monday. I was driving to work on a cold, wet, gray morning. I drove down Exeter Drive, turned right onto Center Street and passed Allan's Market, the Green Thumb Nursery, and the Shape Up Spa.

In front of the Spa one of those portable yellow plastic signs with blinking lightbulbs caught my attention. It hadn't been there Friday. "Invest in health" read the black letters. "Lower your heart attack option."

Being an investment broker myself the words got to me. Two blocks past the sign I turned left into Bean Brokers, Inc. and backed into my assigned parking space. It's the concrete bumper with the name Cavanaugh stenciled in green letters. Goes well with my 1982 green Toyota Tercel.

I'm only two spaces over from Mr. Bean's slot and a mere twenty-five feet from the employee entrance. Ah, the politics of the parking lot. Your true standing in a company is reflected in how far you have to

walk to get in the door. Did you know that?

It was a bad morning. Mondays usually are but this one was not even worth marking as a day on the calendar. I couldn't get the sign out of my mind. My genes flow from good hearty North European stock. Every year I have a physical on my birthday and pass with flying colors. This year, number fifty-six, was no exception.

I don't drink and I'm not married. My lady friends say I put the young bucks to shame. Well, I'm only repeating what I've been told.

True, there's a bit of a bulge around my middle and the crow's-feet around my eyes are expanding to eagle's-claws. My wavy black hair, once the pride of my youth, is now being invaded by gray hairs and they are winning the war. Nor have I heeded the Surgeon General's warning. It's still a pack a day. Job tension is my excuse. I'll quit when I retire.

TED GRISSOM CAME INTO MY OFFICE AROUND TWO IN THE afternoon. His parking space is a good sixty feet from the door and he is a year older than I am. That should tell you everything.

"Frank, I've got a deal so good you can't turn it down." Ted was beaming as he spoke. He's always beaming. I can't imagine why. His car is always breaking down and he has two teenagers still at home and a boy in college.

"Not today, dear, I have a headache." It's an old joke line between us.

"Seriously, hear me out. Even *you* will be impressed."

"All right. You have sixty seconds." I marked the time on my digital watch.

"The Shape Up Spa is having a special on membership. If we can get a group together we get a discount, a big discount. Interested?"

"Go on. Give me the numbers." I stopped looking at my watch. He had my complete attention.

"The price goes down the more people you get. I tried almost everyone and got no takers till old man Bean himself surprised me and said he'd join. Can you believe it?"

"It's hard. The head dragon always gets constipation when it comes to spending money."

"Don't I know it. But his wife is after him for falling asleep at the dinner table. And my wife says I've got to shape up. I'm falling behind in my marital duties." He patted his extensive waistline with one hand, ruffled his thick white hair with the other, and winked . . . all at the same time.

"What's the bottom line?" I asked.

"Attractive. If you join with us—and I do see a bit of a bulge

pushing you away from the desk—the cost will be \$175 for a year. That compares to a single membership of \$280 for a year. It's a bargain."

I pulled out my checkbook and began writing. My hands seemed to have a life of their own. I'm tight with money too, but I was investing in health, wasn't I? Health is a stock with a future.

Ted took the check and looked at it suspiciously. "That's it, just like that? No arguments or counter proposals?"

I lied. "Actually you caught me at a good time. I've been thinking about joining. My date Friday night thought I'd never make home base." I wasn't about to admit my decision had been influenced mainly by a blinking sign.

Ted laughed. "Women. We'd die of boredom without them, wouldn't we?" He beamed at me, waved the check, and said, "Let's go over there right after work. See you at five. Oh, Bean starts next week. He's tied up this week."

THE INSIDE OF THE SHAPE UP SPA LOOKED LIKE A MEDIEVAL torture chamber. There were lights, mirrors, and machines everywhere. Nubile young women pedaled away on stationary bicycles. Muscled young men stared off into space and lifted dumbbells again and again. I saw only two gray heads. They stood out like dandelion weeds on a well-manicured lawn.

"If you would like to buy a shirt and shorts with the Spa logo, they are half price to members." The girl behind the counter spoke with a soft, precise voice. She had fair weather blue eyes, pale blonde hair, fragile porcelain skin, and a perfect body.

"Do you also have new bodies for half price?" I asked.

The blue eyes turned stormy. "We are a health establishment, not an escort service," she said with a chill.

"I didn't mean anything obscene. I was talking about my own body. I feel out of place and out of shape." I had the grace to blush.

Her blue eyes cleared a bit: "Well, that's why we're called the Shape Up Spa, isn't it? You'll have a new body in no time."

We retired to the men's locker to change into our new workout clothes. Missy, the porcelain doll, left her counter post to demonstrate all the machines for us. After an hour of doing every routine with the smallest possible weights, both Ted and I were ready for the fun part.

We stripped off our shirts, sucked in our sagging stomachs, and were headed for the sauna when David Joiner, the Spa owner, intercepted us.

"How's it going, boys?" He flashed a set of perfect pearly whites. David looked like a spa owner should. Thick brown hair, muscles

bulging against his shirt and slacks, a waistline of thirty inches that matched his age. He wore the disgusting aroma of radiant health. I couldn't help but wonder if there wasn't a fatal flaw somewhere . . . maybe he was a closet junk food junkie. If he was, it certainly didn't show.

"It's going good," Ted beamed. "I feel tired but refreshed. Is that weird? The real test will be tomorrow morning. Will I be able to get out of bed?" Everyone laughed.

David moved in close and spoke in a low whisper. "Look, I know it's hard for you two. There's a lot of years weighing down on you. I have a great tonic called Youth Protein drink. Want to try some?"

"How much does it cost?" That's me, good old Frank Cavanaugh, always the dollars and cents man.

"The first one is on me," David replied.

I said I'd pass. Ted decided to give it a try and meet me later in the sauna. When he joined me, I asked him if he felt younger.

"Not yet, but it sure tasted healthy. A green liquid probably blended vegetables. Left an aftertaste like celery."

I was sweating from every pore and game for the pool. Ted wanted to sweat some more, then take a shower. I waved as I walked out the door. He beamed. It was the last time I saw him alive.

While I was lazily swimming around the pool feeling light and relaxed someone found Ted collapsed in the men's shower. The cold water was running full blast on his body but he could no longer feel its bracing effects. He was dead.

By the time I got there the paramedics had covered his body with a white sheet. Everyone stood shocked and silent as they carried his body away.

MONDAY HAD BEEN A GOOD DAY COMPARED TO TUESDAY. When I got to work, Ted's name had already been stenciled out on his concrete bumper. I was upset over his death, but at the same time worry and apprehension about my own health cut like a knife through my efforts to concentrate on work.

Ted must have died because he was in lousy shape. Being unhealthy is a high risk option. And me? I wasn't in much better condition. A year younger, but then I smoked and Ted didn't. I reached for a cigarette, looked at the coffin nail like I was seeing it for the first time, and put it back in the pack.

Missy had said to work out three times a week with a day in between for muscle recuperation. It may sound bizarre but I could hardly wait for Wednesday. For years I had taken people's money and put it to

work for them. Now I had invested in my health and instead of the money working for me I was going to have to do the labor myself. Joining the Spa was more than an investment . . . it was now a matter of life and death.

ON WEDNESDAY THERE WERE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE AT the Spa, but I chummed up with a gray head named Michael Potter—a salesman for Pleasure Craft Boats, he informed me with pride.

“I’ve been coming here for about two months. I’m fifty-four and feel forty-five. Sorry about your friend. He should have started exercising sooner.” Potter wiped his brow with a towel.

I couldn’t have agreed with him more. We adjourned to the sauna, followed by the pool. Potter decided not to take a shower, but I ran into him again as we were both heading for our cars in the parking lot.

“That David is really something,” Potter said with a knowing wink. “He has the secret to youth.”

I was putting my key in the door lock when I heard a gasp. About twenty feet away Potter grabbed his chest and fell forward flat on his face. I ran over, rolled him onto his back, and felt for a pulse in his neck. There was none. Potter was dead. Apparently David had not shared the secret to youth.

Thursday I started to get the shakes. I kept feeling something menacing behind me, but every time I whirled around the air was empty. It was clear to me the Grim Reaper had it in for old men who hadn’t exercised regularly. First Ted and now Potter. Was I next? My need for a cigarette overcame my willpower.

TODAY IS FRIDAY. I HAVE DONNED MY SPA SHIRT AND shorts. I am working out with a vengeance. Like a born again Christian I have discovered “The Answer” and it lies somewhere between dumbbells, pulleys, rowing machines, and a life without cigarettes. I will work out till every muscle aches and then stick with it for an eternity longer.

Missy comes over with a frown on her beautiful face. “You are overdoing it, Frank. Getting in shape is not an overnight thing.”

“You are right,” I gasp as I pull at the weights. “But I’ve got to get in shape so I don’t croak like the other guys. It’s not too late for me.”

“Funny thing. Word has really gotten around.” Missy speaks softly and there a look of pity in her eyes. “We’ve had more people sign up in the last couple of days than ever before. Mostly young people who say they don’t want to keel over like the old guys, so they’d better start working out now. No offense meant.”

"None taken," I reply. Somewhere in the back of my mind a dim lightbulb turns on.

I'm alone now in the sauna and I feel paranoid, disturbed, uneasy. There is a common denominator between the two deaths and what Missy said. What is it? Could it be the Grim Reaper has a helper who is killing gray heads as a way of getting young people to join the Spa? That's absurd. I must be going off the deep end. I look over my shoulder but there's still nothing there, just steam rising from the wet rocks.

David sticks his head into the sauna, looks around, and steps inside. "Hi, you look tired. Investing in health is hard work. Here's a jigger of Youth Protein drink. It's my own invention. In it is the secret of youth. Try some. Your friends did."

I look into his eyes and can read nothing there but sincerity. I reach for the glass as David smiles a perfect pearly white smile. ●

— MYSTERY MINQUIZ —

Whose portrait is on a \$10,000 bill?

It's the image of Theodore Roosevelt.

What do knife, revolver, wrench, lead pipe, rope, and candlestick have in common?

They're all weapons used in the game of CLUE.

What famous fictional detective lives on West 35th Street in New York?

Nero Wolfe lives here in an old brownstone house.

In the 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, what were the weapons used to kill the two wicked witches?

A falling house killed one, a pail of water killed the other.

*She had saved the mementos of her husband's infidelities,
and now it was time to return them!*

Pulling the Wool

by MICHAEL BOBACK

DUNCAN, LATE AS USUAL, SLOUCHED IN THE CONE OF pale yellow light from the overhead porch lamp and groped in his overcoat pocket for the door key, all the while his shifty brown eyes scanned the wide lapels and shoulders for stray, telltale strands of hair.

Through the small-paned window at the end of the long, narrow porch he could see the slender figure of his industrious wife, Isadora, hunched over the spinning wheel in her den. Such an earthy woman, Duncan mused in his boredom, so basic and naive. It was a cinch to pull the wool over her eyes. He chuckled out loud at the irony of his own appraisal.

He found the key at last in his trouser pocket, and secure that his camel-hair coat was devoid of incriminating strands of his latest indiscretion, inserted it in the front door. At the sound of the door being opened, Isadora flew into the spacious foyer to greet him.

"Work late again, Duncan?" she chirped, placing her slender arms over his broad shoulders and pecking him endearingly on the cheek.

"Yeah," he grunted. "Sorry about dinner. Annual Report time. You know how it is."

Duncan tried to wrestle free of her clutch, but Isadora clung with passionate tenacity as the brass chandelier bathed them in its golden glow.

Her cheek rested against the soft nap of his lapel. She was cooing like a lovebird, content now that her mate was back in the nest. The soft camel-hair felt plush, inviting. Duncan had always had a penchant for natural fibers. Isadora tenderly caressed the supple, pliant material.

But as she leaned against his massive frame, her small dark eyes, close and deepset, scanned shoulder and sleeve of his coat for loose strands not in keeping with the rich material.

Suddenly she spied one, a single strand, long and golden, that cap-

tured the overhead light, reflecting it like a neon sign on a Burt Reynolds movie.

Her small slender hand darted up and snatched it with the speed of a robin plucking a worm from the front lawn after a fresh spring rain.

She quickly wound it around her fingers, then thrust her hand into the deep pocket of her coarse, loose-fitting smock. She backed away slowly, smiling contentedly, the corners of her thin lips curling upward like quotation marks, and casually brushed her free hand over the lapel.

"You go freshen up, dear, and I'll warm up the roast. You must be famished after all that *work*. I should call up Mr. Brennan and scold him for working you so hard and keeping you away from me this late."

Isadora kissed him lightly, admiring his handsome face.

Duncan smiled benignly. Safe again, he thought smugly. Nevertheless, grateful to elude further scrutiny, he turned on his heels and bounded up the stairs.

Duncan was tall and solidly built with a shock of chestnut hair flecked with gray above the temples. He had brown deepset eyes set in a handsome, rough-hewn face, a cleft chin and petulant mouth. A prize catch for any woman, she mused as he climbed away from her.

"I'll take a quick shower," he called over his shoulder, "and be right down."

ISADORA SCOOTED INTO HER DEN, WHICH WAS A VERITABLE arts and crafts studio replete with handmade macrame plant hangers, bags of colorful rags to be cut and sorted and later sewn into elaborately designed quilts. In the center of it all was her newest acquisition, an authentic handmade spinning wheel, poised like a giant praying mantis.

She dashed toward a pine hutch cupboard against the far wall and flung open the bottom doors. She reached inside, extracted a bulging nylon bag and carefully undid the wire twist about the neck.

Reaching into her smock pocket, she retrieved the golden gossamer strand and carefully coaxed it down with the others in the bag. Briefly, like a squirrel gloating over its horde of acorns, she examined her bounty, pulling the bag into the stark light.

The dark nylon bag (actually the leg of an old panty hose Isadora discovered in Duncan's attache case after he staggered home a day late, bombed and retching from an ostensible accounting seminar of some sort) bulged with the evidence of Duncan's infidelities during the course of their benign, twelve-year marriage.

There were short hairs and long hairs. Rust red ones, brown ones,

silky chestnut, kinky springy hazel, gleaming auburn that flamed in the light, and platinum and gold that shimmered like a display window in Tiffany's on Christmas Eve. There was black like polished ebony and gray like newly mined silver, others like burnished pewter, apparently from women young enough to be vain about premature gray or old enough to flaunt it boastfully like a warrior's helmet.

The cache of indiscreet hair had been found clinging to every article in Duncan's wardrobe and painfully amassed since a year after they were married and shortly after the difficult birth of their son.

After the baby arrived, Duncan began missing the train, working late, seeing a client, running into an old college chum in Grand Central and sharing a drink. In short, all the old timeworn excuses known to all husbands who go astray as though they all read the same manual on "How to Out Fox The Fox Who Is Now A Mother Hen."

Regardless of the excuse, the pain was always the same, the hurt and deception razor sharp and the anger piercing, for being cast in the role of fool. The initial hurt and betrayal created jealous rages fired into anger and hate, then honed to a lethal dagger's point for revenge. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," it has been written. They may have added, except perhaps that of a woman betrayed.

Isadora smiled cunningly, replacing the wire twist tightly about the neck of the booty, the hairy evidence of a lifetime spent with the wrong man, and carefully returned her cache to the pine vault.

"HONEY. I'M STARVED," DUNCAN WHINED FROM THE doorway behind her. "Can't your spinning wait till later?"

Crouched in front of the massive hutch, her back to Duncan, she felt her back arch up, the muscles in her long, slender neck tense and thought she might spring at him like some species of jungle cat. She took a deep breath and held it until the tenseness and fury subsided, then slowly pushed the door closed and exhaled as she straightened up.

She turned slowly, smoothing the folds of her smock and smiled coyly. "Right away, dear," she said. "I just had to put something away before I misplaced it." Then she brushed past him out into the foyer, heading for the kitchen.

"What are you making now?" he asked indifferently, following her, then slumping at the round oak table and spreading the sports page of the evening paper before him.

"Oh, just a few things for Christmas gifts," she answered wistfully, her voice distant as she leaned down, taking the roast out of the oven. "Gladys gave me all that natural wool last summer when we were up at the farm and I hadn't figured out what to do with it until I picked up

that old spinning wheel at the State Fair on Labor Day. Then it occurred to me I might spin it into yarn and knot some things for gifts."

"Uh-hum," Duncan mumbled. "That's nice dear. Crissakes, the Giants blew another one."

"Do you want arsenic or strychnine on your roast beef, dear?" said Isadora dryly, sotto voce, glaring darkly at Duncan hunched over the paper.

"Huh? Oh, either one. You decide," he said laconically, rustling the paper angrily at the latest Giant defeat. "They put that team in the right place, in the middle of the Jersey swamp and dumps."

She set his plate on the table, made one final attempt at conversation and gave it up when he only grunted or mumbled in reply. She left him to his paper and warmed-over dinner and retreated to her den.

IN THE TIME LEFT BEFORE CHRISTMAS, ISADORA COMPLETED her assorted handicrafts, special gifts of mittens and scarves and woolen caps, with TLC, especially Duncan's. She worked diligently, patiently, a stoic woman with a method to her madness.

Each morning after Duncan left for the office, and their son scooted off to school, Isadora removed her stash from the cupboard and methodically worked the stray hairs into a coarse yarn on her spinning wheel in the earthy hues of autumn leaves.

On Christmas morning she watched with guarded fascination as Duncan ripped away the red wrapping and opened the long, flat box.

"It has such an unusual texture," remarked Duncan quizzically, kneading the long muffler as though it were dough. "It's fluffy, sort of like angora, yet oddly coarse. What is it, dear?"

"Oh," she signed vaguely, clutching her robe tightly at her throat, "sort of my own homemade concoction. A blend of pilfered strands of stolen memories from casual encounters," she explained cryptically. "It's all natural fibers, just the way you like it. I hope it pleases you and think of me hugging you each time it tugs at your neck."

"Oh, I do and I will," he replied hastily. "It will match my cordovan leather motorcycle jacket. Thank you, dear." He leaned over and kissed her lightly on the cheek. The smooth skin felt oddly cool, as if she might be coming down with something. He shrugged and turned away and replaced the thick muffler to the long rectangular box.

Saturday was the day after Christmas on this gift-wrapped four day weekend. The morning was unseasonably mild for December and Duncan thought he might take advantage of it and go for a short spin on his Yamaha 650.

THE MAROON MACHINE, WITH BEAUTIFUL TEARDROP gas tank, graceful pullback handlebars and upswept chrome exhaust pipes, shimmered sleekly when Duncan pushed up the garage door.

Isadora, bundled in a quilted beige thermal coat over her flannel nightie and robe, followed out into the driveway. Duncan wheeled it out into the pale silvery sunlight, then mounted the slick machine.

Isadora stepped beside him and ceremoniously draped the fluffy new muffler around his neck. "You forgot my present, Duncan," she trilled.

"Sorry, dear," muttered Duncan, turning toward Isadora like a knave being knighted as she adjusted it around his neck.

She crossed it in front, then with a single flamboyant flip, tossed it over his shoulder, calculating it so one end hung longer than the other.

Duncan flipped on the ignition, and the 650 roared to life. With both feet flat on the macadam driveway, he raised the gleaming blue helmet and pulled it on, snapping the chin strap snugly, grinning puckishly.

"Have a good ride, Duncan," said Isadora leaning toward him, kissing him lightly on the cheek. "And a safe one, too," she added.

Unseen by Duncan, she reached down and casually flicked the end of the handmade scarf, its fluffy fibers the woven hairs of all his infidelities, her horde of a lifetime of hurt and betrayal, against the sprocket on the rear wheel.

She stood back and waved jovially as he spurred down the driveway, her other hand clutching at her throat.

"Bye-bye, baby," she snarled beneath the angry growl of the cycle as he streaked toward the street.

Duncan got as far as the street when the tail of the scarf caught the axle. His head jerked back, the roar of the 650 drowning out any plea he might have made.

Isadora cupped her hand over her mouth as Duncan was yanked back and down against the turning rear wheel, the scarf winding tighter and tighter . . .

The Yamaha swerved out of control halfway down the block where it toppled to rest against the curb, pinning Duncan beneath staring blankly with bulging, unseeing glassy eyes, his swollen tongue already a motley blue, protruding grotesquely from the corner of his gaping mouth.

Behind the cupped hand Isadora was grinning like Sylvester after he gobbled Tweety Bird.

Somehow she didn't think the neighbors would appreciate the grisly irony of her handmade gift.

Out of the slush pile and into the acceptance bin—here's the saga of one writer's struggle for literary immortality!

Birth of a Mystery Writer

by LARRY R. LA MEE

LOOKING BACK, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SAY EXACTLY when I first wanted to become a mystery writer. I certainly wasn't born under some dark star. There weren't any black cats heralding my arrival the way a proper mystery writer would make his way into this world. Possibly the first indication I had was when I'd just finished reading a collection of mysteries for kids. I was so excited I ran into the living room to tell my father that I wanted to become a writer.

"Dad," I said to an upheld newspaper.

"Ummh?"

"I want to be a mystery writer," I said in a serious eight-year-old voice.

"Ummh."

I guess that I can't really say that it all started there because I never did anything with the desire, what with summer vacation and Mike's new minibike. Mike was my best friend at the time. I never seemed to

find the time for writing. Looking back again, maybe it was when I was seventeen and had rediscovered the excitement of mysteries. I can still remember walking into the front room filled with anticipation.

"Dad," I said to an upheld newspaper.

"Ummh?"

"I want to be mystery writer," I said in a serious seventeen-year-old voice.

"Ummh."

Then again I can't say that it all started there either. I still never did anything with the desire to write, what with track season and Mary Ellen "Boom Boom" Murphy, writing just never seemed to come out on top.

After having looked back again and again, I guess that I could say I made my true commitment to becoming a writer of mystery stories when I first started college. I had just left the army, having spent four years pointing cannons at people the government and my gunnery sergeant didn't like. I'm sure that Freud would have said that I went into the army because of my relationship with "Boom Boom." He probably would have been right, but that's another story. I left the army with hair that was too short for the times and a copy of the G.I. Bill that guaranteed me an easy, if not overly extravagant, living for the next four years.

THE COLLEGE I ATTENDED WAS A TYPICAL STATE COL-lege with dorms, cafeteria, library, classrooms, and girls. When I first started there I had every intention of getting the most for my education, which meant learning where the best place was to get a hamburger, where the best place was to meet girls, and learning how to do the least amount of work to get a passing grade.

Things went this way for the first term. Then, during the semester break, when most of the girls were gone, I went to the library, a place I normally tried to avoid, to try and alleviate some of the boredom I felt. It was there in the back, categorized by the Dewey decimal system, that I found a book of mystery stories. My heart pounded, my palms began to sweat, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. I hadn't felt this way since the first time that "Boom Boom" and I . . . well that's another story too.

I thumbed through the book tenderly. Filled with a kind of nostalgia, I sat down in a worn chair and started reading and only quit when two rather husky library attendants took me by the arms and dragged me to the checkout desk.

I SPENT THE WHOLE VACATION READING MYSTERIES, becoming more and more convinced that this time I had found my true calling. I couldn't wait for the new semester to begin to get started on my new career, so I tried to find if any of the English professors had remained on campus over the break. It wasn't an easy task locating any of them. I think that they are required to take a class on student avoidance before they get their degree, but my luck was in and so was one of the professors.

"I want to be a mystery writer," I said to the fleeing figure.

"See me in my office after the break," he called back.

"Wait!" I yelled. "How should I go about getting started?"

"Write about what you know," he said, leaping into the campus bus.

Write about what you know? How do you do that? I suppose I could commit a crime and then write about it. The only problem would be if I got caught I don't think that the police would be overly sympathetic to my plight: "Well, officer I did steal the diamond necklace, but it was only because I need to write about what I know, not because I'm a real criminal." Yeah, I figure that story should get me two weeks off of my twenty-year sentence.

The other option I had, as near as I could figure it, was to study everything about mysteries, maybe even become a detective. After all, detectives are the people most found in mysteries—that is, excluding victims and perpetrators. I liked that idea; maybe not become an actual detective, but dress up like one, act like one, and learn to think like one. That certainly came under the heading of writing about what you know, and it sounded like fun as well.

I went down to the second hand store and bought an old trench coat and on the way back to the dorms found a wide-brimmed hat in some alley. The hat was several sizes too big, but some folded newspapers took care of that. I took to smoking cheap cigars; I think they were made in Mexico out of old burro droppings. I even bought a gun. It was only a cap gun, but it looked real, from a distance.

I practiced following people at random, both in my car and on foot. I had to give this up though when some guy took a couple of shots at me; he thought I was a real private investigator working for his ex-wife, whom he claims was related to Dracula. I was happy to think that he thought I was a real private eye, but I wasn't happy about being shot at, so I decided to practice my skills in other ways.

I corraled what friends I had—those that hadn't been driven away by the smell of my cheap cigars—to play Clue, 221-B Baker Street, The Consulting Detective, and any other games that I thought would allow me to sharpen my detective skills. I watched every detective show on

television and every old mystery movie that came to the campus theatre. I learned to spot a clue with the best of them. I could follow a lead like a bloodhound on a fresh scent. I could build a motive from the slightest hint. Opportunities were as easy to spot as stars on a clear night. I was ready.

RETURNING TO THE SECONDHAND STORE WHERE I HAD bought my coat, I purchased a typewriter, one of the old manual kind that had more character than keys. Then, locking myself into my room at every opportunity, I wrote mysteries. Only there was something wrong with the typewriter; it only turned out trash. The sentences either rambled, leading nowhere, or weren't sentences at all. The spelling was more often creative than accurate. The punctuation was sporadic at best. I was amazed at what that typewriter had done to my flowing prose. How it had mangled my ingenious plots. How it had made me look like the proverbial southbound end of a northbound mule. I got so outraged that I shot the darn thing with my cap pistol, and caps aren't cheap. It was then that I decided I needed further help.

Making use of my newly acquired skills, I went looking for the professor I had talked to earlier in the year, I finally managed to track him down.

"I need to learn how to write properly," I said to the person in the next stall. I heard a moan and saw the professor making a break for it, pants down around his ankles and trailing toilet paper. It wasn't until sometime later that I learned of his dismissal on a morals charge. It seems that professors aren't allowed to wander across campus with their pants down for any reason.

I enrolled in a writing class with the new English professor, after trading in my trench coat for a button down sweater with pockets, my cigars for a pipe—much to the relief of my friends and fellow classmates—and my wide-brimmed hat for an Irish tweed. I sweated, cursed, and wrote in class. And, then, I sweated, cursed, and wrote in my room. I learned to write clean, crisp, clear sentences. I improved my punctuation and my spelling—well maybe my spelling still needs some work.

I sent off mystery stories of all kinds. I sent them to magazines, newspapers, book publishers, to contests that I read about on the backs of match book covers. I even wrote them in indelible ink on bathroom walls. I spent a small fortune on stamps, envelopes, paper, ribbons, and correction fluid—it seems that the typewriter still had a tendency to mess up once in a while. I sat back and waited for the fame and fortune to roll in. Things did start to roll in all right—mass produced rejection

slips. Oh, they came in all shapes and sizes and colors, but they all said the same thing: "Don't call us, we certainly won't be calling you!" Someone even painted over all the stories in the bathrooms.

DEPRESSED, AND REJECTED, AND REJECTED, AND REJECTED, I thought about giving up. There was something I was lacking; somewhere along the way I had made a wrong turn. I had learned to be a passable detective, learned how to write; I just didn't know what it was that I could be missing. I decided to go back and have just one more talk with a professor; this time I was going to go to the head of the English department.

"Excuse me professor," I said, "can I talk to you before you leave?" I had managed to track him down at the airport. The man looked frantically around and increased his pace up the stairs, a pretty young coed in tow.

"Professor," I called, raising my voice to be heard over the background noises. "I want to be a mystery writer, how do I go about it?"

"You need a gimmick," he yelled back as they closed the door to the airplane.

"A gimmick," I thought as I walked back to my car, almost bumping into the professor's wife, her lawyer in tow. I had become a fairly good detective, so I could write about what I know. I had further worked and slaved to learn to write what it was I knew. And, for all that work I may as well have gone out and committed some crime and written about it; at least then I would have had a gimmick.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a thought glimmered.

I went back to the old secondhand shop again and bought a camera with a telephoto lens, the kind that would take a picture of a flea at a thousand yards. Then, I went back to my dorm room and went through some of my old magazines looking for an article I had once read, an interview with one of the editors of the magazine, one of the magazines that had turned me down earlier.

Well that is the end of my story, the story of the birth of a mystery writer. And, if you're reading this you'll be happy to know that the editor's wife hasn't seen those pictures I took. They were gimmick enough, and while I understand that he burned them I still have the negatives.

●

*There were three suspects, and the dying man had pointed
an accusing finger at one of them!*

Yet One More Dying Message

by STEVE LINDLEY

"THERE'S NOTHING I HATE MORE," SERGEANT QUINLAN spat at me through his cigar smoke, "nothing in the world I hate more than these damn dying messages."

We were standing over the corpse of John McKenna, famous agent for bad nightclub acts. Before he died he had dragged his bullet-riddled body across the room to a wall full of eight-by-ten glossies of famous show-biz types. If any of them had ever been his client, then Paul Newman ate at all those sleazy delis across America that had his picture hanging over the cash register. In McKenna's hand was the photo of a famous comedian who, for the sake of good taste, shall remain nameless.

"You know, lieutenant," Quinlan continued, "this message is even more cryptic than that dead dame's last month. Remember? The one we found clutching the photo of her poodle?"

How could I forget? We had every dog catcher in town down for questioning until we realized we had arrested a neighborhood prowler that same night who sported a permanent.

I pointed to three people sitting across the room. "Are those the suspects?"

"Yup," Quinlan answered. "The one on the left is Jack Starr. He's a singer, but also tells a few jokes. The guy in the middle is Johnny Hollywood, magician extraordinaire."

"Anything funny about his act?"

"Only that it's bad. The third is the dead man's wife, Alice. She's a dancer. But that's why the dying message doesn't make any sense. There are a dozen pictures of singers and dancers on that wall, and a couple of magicians. Why the comic?"

I walked across the room to Alice McKenna.

"This must be pretty hard on you," I said.

"Oh, officer," she cried, holding out her arms to me. I slapped the cuffs on her.

"Book her, Quinlan."

"But, lieutenant," the sergeant stammered. "The dying message. Why so cryptic?"

"It's the least cryptic message we've ever had, Quinlan," I said. "McKenna was trying to say directly to us, through the comic, what he would have told us himself if he was still alive. It's the oldest line in the world."

"Oh no, lieutenant."

"Oh yes, Quinlan. 'Take my wife . . . please'."

Ⓢ

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

Who portrayed Sam, the piano man, in the movie *Casablanca*?

Dooley Wilson was the actor who played "As Time Goes By" for Bogart and Bergman.

What two letters are not on telephone dials?

The seventeenth and the twenty-sixth letters of the alphabet.

Raymond Edward Johnson was the host of what famous scary radio program?

Raymond hosted "Inner Sanctum."

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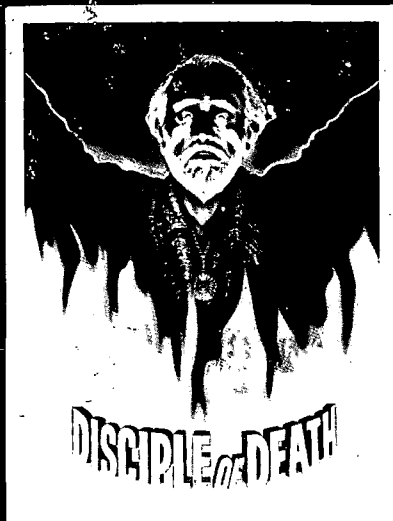
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